JUNE 2017

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THE MAGAZINE OF THE SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

LEGENDS OF TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

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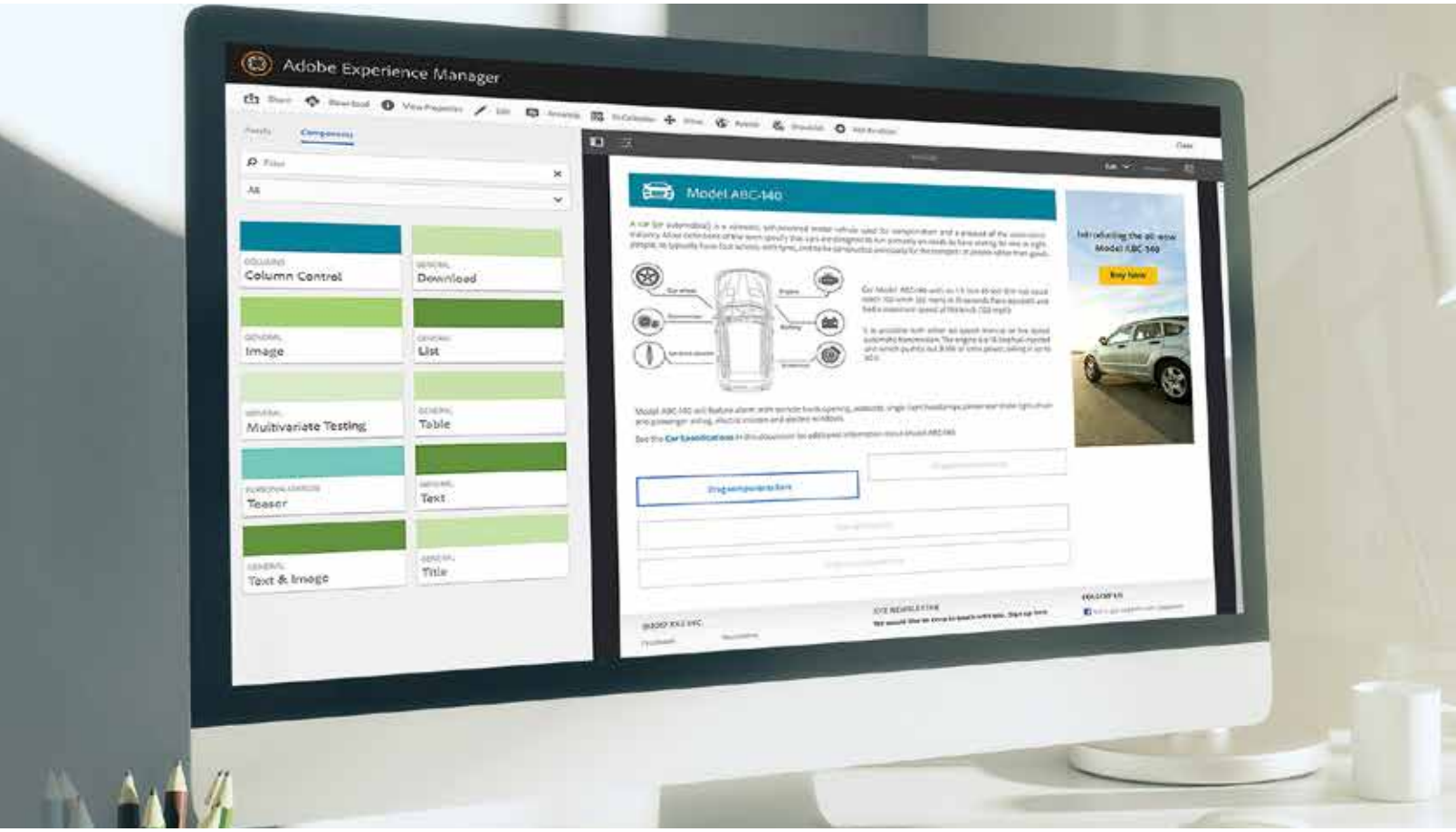

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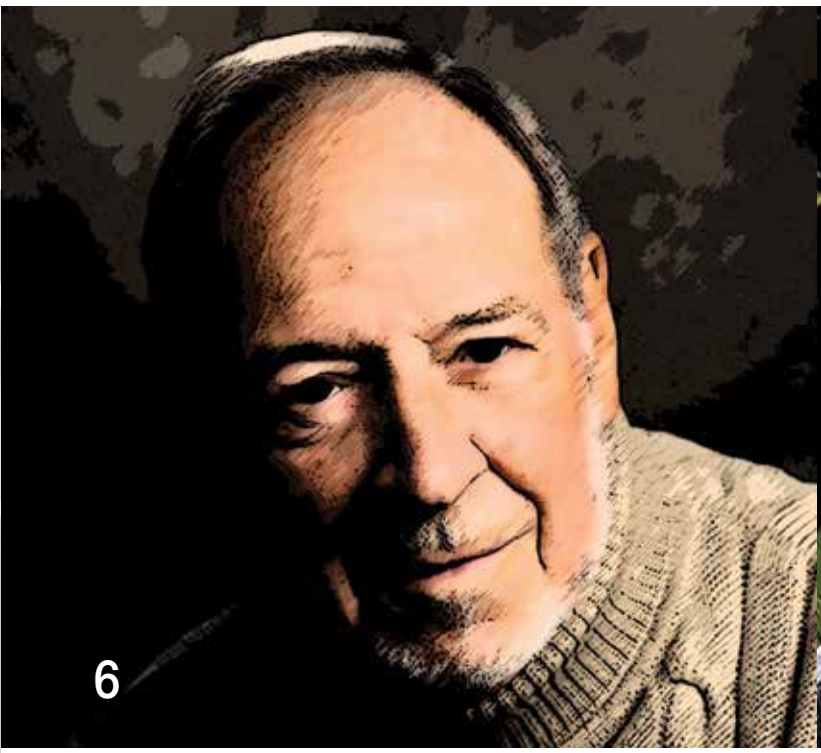

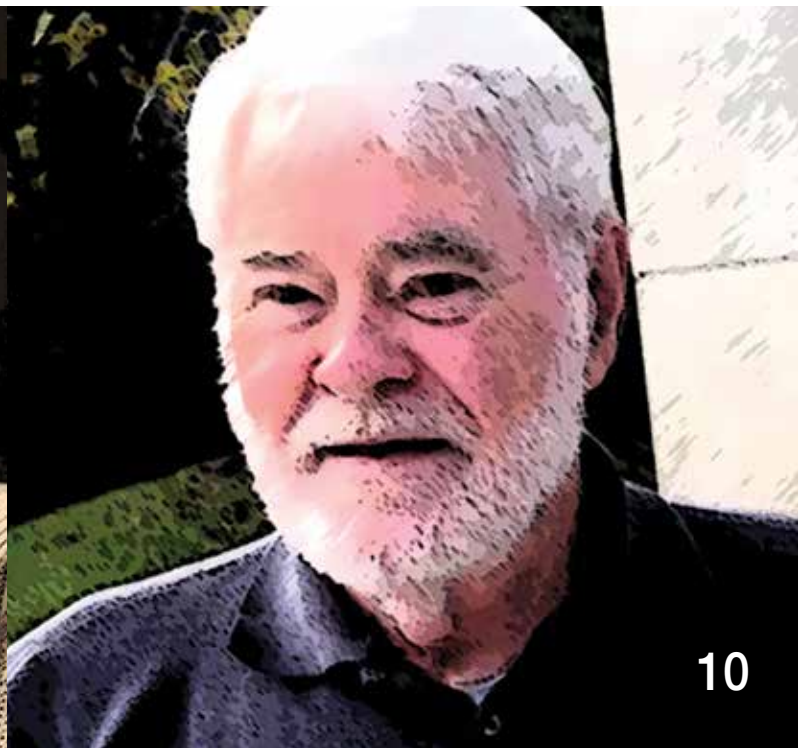

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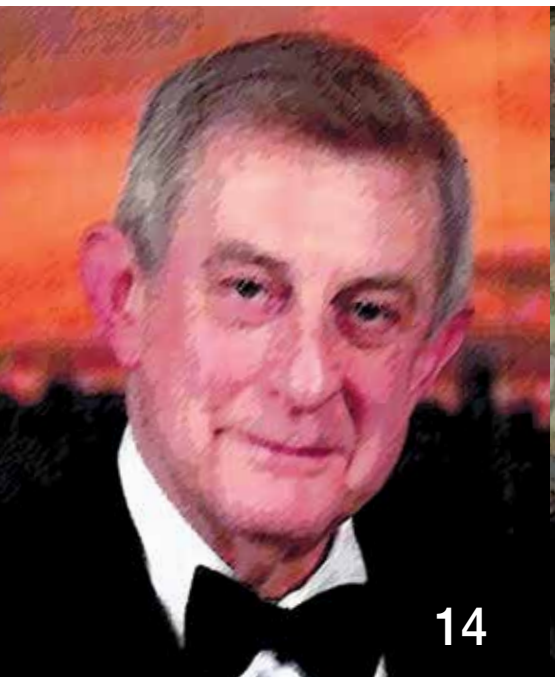

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Assistant Editor James Cameron
Editorial Assistant Shonell Bacon

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
Scott Abel, *Meet the Change Agents*
Thomas Barker, *The Academic Conversation*
Nicky Bleiel, *The Essentials*
Kit Brown-Hoekstra and Cindy Currie, *Ask a Tech Comm Manager*
Jeanette Evans and Charles Dull, *Emerging Technologies*
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SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION
9401 Lee Highway, Suite 300
Fairfax, VA 22031-1803
+1(703) 522-4114 | +1(703) 522-2075 fax
Send questions and correspondence to the editor at the above address. General information about STC: stc@stc.org *or* www.stc.org.

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A Note from the Editor

WITH THE POPULARITY of the November/December *Intercom* issue on "legends of technical communication," guest edited by Nicky Bleiel, I am pleased to publish another set of interviews of cutting-edge professionals within the field. Dr. George Hayhoe has guest edited the June issue with six articles written by students of Mercer University based on interviews they submitted for a class project on the history of technical communication.

Dr. Hayhoe is Professor Emeritus at Mercer University School of Engineering, the Editor-in-Chief of IEEE's *Transactions on Professional Communication*, and Fellow of both STC and of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers.

I want to thank Dr. Hayhoe and all the student authors of articles in this issue, as well as their interviewees, for their work and excellent contributions to *Intercom*. With STC's 65th anniversary upcoming in the 2018 membership season, I hope the issue will inspire and motivate technical communicators for the next 65 years.

—Liz Pohland
liz.pohland@stc.org

A Note from the Guest Editor

AS I WAS preparing to teach a master's-level course on the history of technical communication during the spring semester at Mercer University, I received an email announcing the publication of the November/December 2016 issue of *Intercom*. That issue featured interviews with six "Legends of Technical Communication," as well as briefer answers to questions from a number of STC Summit keynoters. I had been thinking about assigning an oral history project in the course, so Nicky Bleiel's special issue of interviews provided not only inspiration for the assignment but also models for my students to follow.

I asked a number of STC colleagues if they would be willing to sit for hour-long telephone or Skype interviews with my students. Everyone I approached agreed. I selected the six best interviews submitted by the class, and those interviews are presented in this issue, having been lightly edited by me and reviewed for accuracy by the interviewees.

Together, this group possesses a wealth of knowledge about the development of our profession. Ron Blicq began his technical communication career doing occasional editing work in a Canadian Air Force publications unit during World War II, and ultimately formed his own consulting firm and taught at a technical college. Don Cunningham started by doing clerical work as a Navy yeoman during the Korean War and eventually become an influential professor, journal editor, and textbook author in the field. Jeffrey Hibbard and Richard Hodgkinson worked for IBM on either side of "the pond," Jeff on the editorial staff of the *IBM Journal of Research and Development*, and Richard as a graphic artist, icon designer, and accessibility expert. Ken Cook has worked with several companies but has spent most of his career with the Ken Cook Co., founded by his father, providing technical communication services to major corporations in the United States and around the world. Stephanie Rosenbaum began in a technical writing job that helped pay her undergraduate tuition and eventually founded her own consultancy that provides information architecture and user experience services.

All six of these folks have been active in professional organizations, including STC, the IEEE Professional Communication Society, the Association of Teachers of Technical Writing, the UK's Institute of Scientific and Technical Communicators (ISTC), and the UX Professionals Association. Ron, Don, Jeff, Ken, and Stephanie are STC Fellows; Richard is a Fellow of the ISTC. Jeff and Ken have served as STC President.

I am grateful to all of them as well as to my students in Mercer's MS Program in Technical Communication Management for making this special issue possible. These interviews represent not only a contribution to the history of our profession but also stories that I hope will inspire the next generation of technical communicators.

—George Hayhoe

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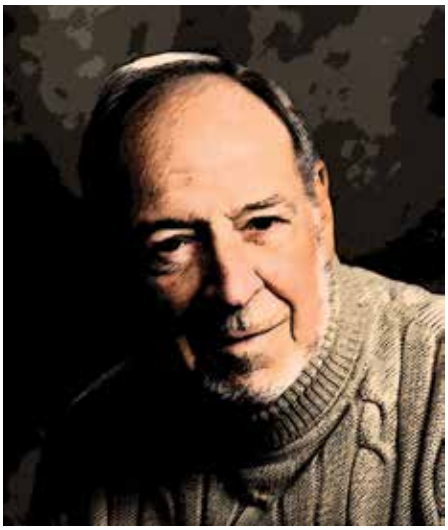
A Conversation with Ron Blicq:



From Aviator to Technical Communicator

By ELIZABETH BREWER

Ron Blicq has had a very interesting career. Although he did not attend college, he had the opportunity to work as a technical editor in the Royal Air Force and for an engineering firm. He eventually used the knowledge he had acquired throughout his extensive career and taught at a technical college. Aside from his professional career, Ron enjoys writing plays on the side and has had 13 produced and performed around the world.

I began our interview by mentioning that in my background research on him, I had noticed how very diverse his career had been. He noted that he had been very lucky and really enjoyed his experiences, from his background in industry all the way to teaching at a local college in Winnipeg. After our introductions, I asked some questions to get some basic background about Ron's career path.

Elizabeth Brewer: Why did you choose to go into technical communication and was it your first choice?

Ron: I didn't. I didn't choose to. I was exposed to it when I was a flyer in the Air Force, and you were given other jobs to do, and I was part of a specialist navigation institute. I ran the publications unit knowing nothing about technical communication.

Ron went on to explain that he had volunteered for the Canadian Air Force after finishing high school and had fought in World War II in Europe. He explained that his role as a flyer specifically involved many things. He was a navigator, radio operator, and bombardier. Then he was given other jobs to do, such as working with the publications unit.

Elizabeth: Okay, so what did that position entail?

Ron: It involved helping engineers and other navigators write instruction manuals and operating manuals for what were new technologies at that time. After they wrote the manuals, I would edit them. So, I really became a technical editor before I became a technical writer.

Elizabeth: How did all of that come about? Did it fall into your lap?

Ron: Yes, it fell into my lap. I was in the Air Force and you did what you were told.

Ron continued to share that, after the war, he transferred to the British Royal Air Force and flew with them for almost 15

years. When he left the Air Force, he joined a firm that involved maintaining the defense lines across northern Canada. Part of that job involved writing reports for the US Air Force. The reports documented the status of work being done to maintain and upgrade the defense bases comprising what were known as the Pinetree and Mid-Canada Lines across the width of Canada. It also included writing proposals for new work.

As the conversation continued, Ron noted that his first experience with technical communication involved technical editing, and later on he moved to writing. He explained that he learned to edit documents on the job while he was in the Royal Air Force, and then later from the IEEE Professional Communication Society and STC.

Elizabeth: Did you enjoy the editing or writing more?

Ron: About 50/50. But I particularly liked the editing part because I liked tweaking words. The writing part came much later, but I will explain that later on.

Experience

I asked Ron whether he had ever had the opportunity to attend school anywhere. He replied that once he had left the Air Force, he continued his career at an engineering firm called CAE Industries LTD and gained more experience, so he never attended college. He then talked specifically about why experience is so important.

Ron: Experience is very useful. Learning things on the job really is important. I applaud the courses that are available to you now, but you learn an immense number of things on the job.

Elizabeth: I guess that ties in with the next question. Since you have had experience both in industry (the Air Force and an engineering firm) and as an educator, do you think that having the background in industry is important if you are going to become a professor within the field?

Ron: Yes, I think the industrial experience helps immensely. Although my background was in aviation and electronics, when I went to work at the college in Canada, I was assigned to the civil engineering students. Since I was used to technical terminology and the way that technical people think, the assignment didn't throw me. That's why I think that it's useful for you as a technical communicator to have some background experience in an industry.

For example, you may go into gyroscope technology. Learn that field; then, when you go somewhere else, all of that information helps, even though the two jobs might not be related. I also taught childhood education students how to write observations. You wouldn't think so, but my experience writing technical documents was of great help in teaching them.

Ron shared that his background in technical communication with both the Air Force and at the engineering firm helped him when it came to teaching the college students that were studying early childhood education. He explained that being able to focus the information and being able to separate what you would like to write about from what people need to hear helped immensely. Essentially, he was saying that knowing how to tailor the message to meet the needs of the audience helped significantly. That is part of the reason why he was asked to teach the childhood education students. He provided a specific example about what he meant.

Ron: For example, when childhood education students write an observation on a child involving child abuse, including an opinion or personal thought will result in the report being thrown out of court. They can deal only with facts, so there is a really close connection between these kinds of reports and technical communication.

I then continued to ask Ron which group he enjoyed teaching more, the civil engineering students or the early childhood education students? He responded that he enjoyed teaching technical communication to engineering technology students because that was natural to him, but he also enjoyed teaching the childhood education students because they wanted to write from the heart but had to learn to write from the mind, from what they saw. He said it was about 50/50, with a slight edge to the childhood education students.

Professional Organizations

The interview soon moved into a conversation about the different professional organizations that Ron had been a part of, as well as his recommendations. I wanted to find out which had benefitted him the most, and which societies he would suggest for someone like me who is just starting out in the field.

Elizabeth: Which professional organizations have you been involved in and which ones provided you with the most professional development opportunities as well as personal satisfaction?

Ron: As soon as I got into the engineering field with CAE Industries Ltd, which I worked for after the Air Force, I joined the IEEE Professional Communication Society. In the early years, and for many years, it was the one that I got the most out of. The second one would be STC. The third one would be ISTC, the Institute for Scientific and Technical Communication in the United Kingdom. I think

they do the best quality work as an organization, but they are not the one that I had the most experience with. I have been to their conferences, and they do beautiful work. The last one would be the ATTW, the Association of Teachers of Technical Writing. Can I add something to that from your point of view?

Elizabeth: Absolutely!

Ron: I recommend that anybody who is involved in technical communication should join one of these societies. Join two in fact. Don't just be a belonger, but be an active member of them. Volunteer for positions. That is how you get to know people and learn what other people in the field are doing. I also recommend belonging to an engineering or technical organization in the field in which you are working. One goes with the other. When you are in the technical organization and you go to their conferences, you can offer a paper or presentation on how to communicate well with your peers inside your organization, and you start getting known.

Ron noted that although he wasn't trying to be known, submitting papers and presenting at conferences worked really well for him. He also mentioned that the opportunity that the organizations gave him to get to know people really helped with networking and then eventually getting information that helped him in his career.

Evolution of Technical Communication

We soon moved into discussing how technical communication has evolved since he started his career.

Elizabeth: How did your role as a technical communicator evolve over your career?

Ron: First of all, I didn't know it was evolving when I was in the Air Force. When I came out, I needed to find a job in Winnipeg. In 1957, there were no technical communicators in the city. This company called CAE Industries needed an editor for all of the manuals they were writing. I fell into it, and this gave me a double advantage. I had grown accustomed to the British standards for technical writing and then was exposed to the American standards. Now I can write in both domains. I only realized I was being a technical communicator when I was at the firm I worked for here in Winnipeg. It was from there that I was invited to go and teach at the college in Canada.

Elizabeth: What are some major differences you see in the jobs that are available in technical communication today versus when you began your career?

Ron: I can see more and more that the technical communicator becomes a project manager. Originally the product would be made, and then they would bring somebody in to do the technical writing. It is much better for you as a technical communicator to be there from the beginning and see how the product and the accompanying documentation grow. Your input will often be more valuable because you can see things that the product developers don't see.

I mentioned that one of the readings for my class discussed how the title "technical writer" can sometimes carry a negative connotation. I asked Ron if he had experienced this problem in his career. He said that he had and explained that it was because nobody knew what technical writers were.

I also asked specifically about technology and the changes it has brought to technical communication over the years. Without hesitation, Ron said that word processing has been the biggest change. He explained that it has been both good and bad. He said that it was good because of the ease that it brings to the writing process. However, he also explained that it has been bad because we miss more when proofreading on screen than we do when we read a hard copy.

International Experience

Much of Ron's experience has been international, so he was able to share the differences he had seen between the technical communication field as we know it in the United States versus the technical communication field internationally.

Elizabeth: We've already talked a bit about your international work, but are there any notable differences compared to the domestic field of technical communication?

Ron: Overall, no, but be aware that you have to allow for the differences in the way they think and speak in each country. Also, be aware that punctuation is different in different countries. A simple example is that in the United States and in Canada, we use double quotation marks, but in Europe they use single quotation marks. Also in the United Kingdom, the period at the end of the quotation mark tends to go outside, when in the United States it goes on the inside. There is a myriad of little things that we don't realize. It is not the business of technical communication itself that changes, but the subtleties underneath.

I asked Ron whether there were any more significant differences in technical communication aside from basic grammar. He said that essentially there are not, but in the United Kingdom, there is much more emphasis on translating technical documents to or from

English to another language. Ron then mentioned that he had recently taught some workshops in Australia, Germany, and New Zealand. Although he is retired, teaching workshops and traveling allows him to stay active within the field.

Final Thoughts

As we neared the end of our interview, I asked Ron whether there were any core traits that he had noticed among technical communicators. He noted that one trait that stood out to him was that most technical communicators are self-driven and also able to work well in a team environment.

I also asked him whether there were any resources that he wished had existed when he started working in technical communication. He referred back to some of the technical societies we had discussed as he explained that back then, he had to generate almost everything by himself, and it would have been nice to be a part of a group where he realized he wasn't alone.

I then asked him a few specific questions about his career in technical communication to bring our conversation to a close.

Elizabeth: You mentioned earlier a society that you wish you had known about. Is there anything else that you wish that you had known when you were first starting your career?

Ron: Not that I am conscious of. Maybe I should have, but technical communication was developing as a field and I was right there doing it without knowing that I was doing it.

Elizabeth: That's okay, you have given me wonderful answers so far. It has been really fascinating to learn about your journey.

Ron: It has been an interesting one, hasn't it?

Elizabeth: Absolutely! Would you say that your journey through technical communication, even though it wasn't what you had planned on doing, was everything you had hoped for?

Ron: It changed. As soon as I joined the Air Force, that became my life. It was only because of family circumstances that I eventually had to resign from the Air Force and move back to Canada, and I didn't know where I was going to find work. It was by sheer chance that someone said that I had been doing technical writing and that a firm happened to be looking for a technical writer. That is how I got into it in a full-term sense. But then I was called a technical editor, which is probably not a bad name to have as compared to technical writer. Technical editor makes it sound as though you are much more in control of the project. Technical writer sounds as though you are an addition to it.

Conclusion

I began to bring the interview to a close by asking Ron about something I uncovered in my preliminary research about him: I asked about the plays that he had written. Ron shared that it is an excellent way to use your skills as a writer and continue to challenge yourself. He shared that so far, 13 of his plays have been produced. He shared that there is a lot to technical communicating and that you can tie your writing skills into a variety of different regimes. I continued to ask him for any final advice that he might have.

Elizabeth: You have given me some advice already, but what other advice would you give someone who is just starting to explore the field of technical communication and what it has to offer?

Ron: I would say quite frankly to go and work in Europe, or Australia, or New Zealand; they are strong in technical communication. Go look for a job down there because you will be exposed to the same basic guidelines to technical writing, but different nuances are really good eye openers, and it has all been really useful to me.

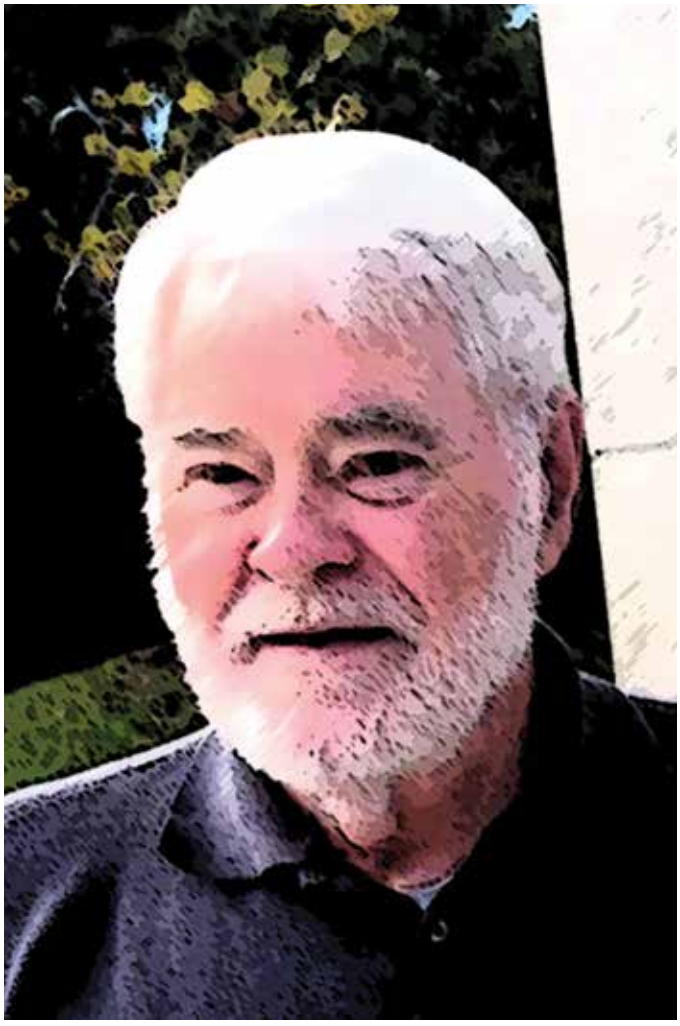
When I asked him whether there was a particular place through all of his travels that really stood out as being strong in technical communication, he was quick to respond: Germany. Ron noted that he had been involved in Intecom, a cooperative organization for technical communication societies around the world, and he found through his experience that Germany was especially strong in technical communication.

His final words of advice were very optimistic.

Ron: Don't be afraid to expand your role and make your role as a technical communicator really meaningful. The role of a technical communicator is being looked at as much more part of the team than it was in my early days. You were a scribe then. Now you are part of the team. I think that it is a great field to be in, and we need people like you to push it further and broaden the field. The skills today are much more practical, and you can apply them in multiple fields.

ELIZABETH BREWER *teaches marketing at Hickory Ridge High School in Harrisburg, NC. She is a student in the MS Program in Technical Communication Management at the Mercer University School of Engineering.*

A Conversation with Don Cunningham: An "Idiosyncratic and Unpredictable" Career



By DANIEL MADDUX

GROWING UP in rural central Missouri, Don Cunningham had no greater dream than to work at Nub Baldwin's Conoco gas station. Coming from a family of farmers and mechanics, he assumed his life's work would be in a related field. Little did Don know that he would become an academic, an expert technical communicator, the author of several books, and an ATTW and STC Fellow.

When I asked Don what initially sparked his interest in technical communication, he told me that it definitely wasn't planned out. He had no intention of going to college when he graduated from high school. Instead, he joined the military. The Korean War was going on at the time, and on his seventeenth birthday, he joined the National Guard because although the U.S. Army would accept him, he couldn't knowingly be assigned to a combat zone until he was eighteen. After a year in the National Guard, he joined the U.S. Navy, serving four years—three on sea duty (Korea, Sea of Japan, East China Sea, South Pacific) on a destroyer and two auxiliary oil and gas tankers. He was on the crew of the *USS Kishwaukee* (AOG 8) that helped supply the French Foreign Legion in April and early May 1954 during the battle of Dien Bien Phu in what was then French Indo-China. His last year in the Navy he was stationed at Camp Elliott, a U.S. Navy and Marine Corps Retraining Command in San Diego.

"I probably learned more about writing in the military than I did in any course in college," he said.

Don became a yeoman, which involved a lot of clerical work. His main responsibility was to write the ship's daily orders and military orders by senior officers. The officers would jot down notes, and he would write those notes up into orders. The officers would send back revisions, and eventually they produced a finalized order. He realized how crucial clarity of expression and purpose was. The orders not only had to be clear, but also, they had to be virtually impossible to misunderstand.

He said it was funny how all of that led to a career in technical communication. "Everything in my life seems to have been idiosyncratic and unpredictable," he said.

Growing into a Career

I asked Don how he got involved in technical communication as a profession. He shared that after he got out of the Navy, he attended the University of Missouri. His first declared major was physical education, and he was considering coaching as a profession. However, that year Mizzou hired a new coach, Frank Broyles. When Coach Broyles came in, he got rid of most of the assistant coaches, and Don realized that there was no job security in coaching.

Don started trying to figure out what he wanted to do for a career. He became a history major, but that lasted only one semester. He thought more about what he enjoyed most, and what his best grades were in. The clear answer eventually came: English. He studied American and British literature and eventually earned a doctorate in that field. He thought he would have a career in literature.

When Don was a doctoral student, he taught literature courses, including a 300-level American Literature course. He may have been the first doctoral student assigned to teach a 300-level literature course at Mizzou. But even then, he was being exposed to technical communication. He edited research reports for the University of Missouri School of Nursing and School of Medicine to make some extra money. Those reports, stemming from research grants from what was then the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, received commendations of excellence, especially for the editing portion of the work. He thought to himself, "I can really do this."

"I was eventually asked to teach English 60, which was a basic technical writing course for engineering, agriculture, and forestry majors," Don stated. The Director of Freshman Composition and Rhetoric courses, Willoughby Johnson, thought the students would respect him.

Academic Journeys

From there, Don completed three degrees from the University of Missouri, got married, and had a son. After getting his doctorate, Don was hired on at Southern Illinois University Carbondale. There, he was asked to revamp and improve their undergraduate service courses in technical writing. After he moved to Morehead State University in Kentucky as Director of Writing Courses, Texas Tech sought him out. "They hired me as a tenured professor, which was a rarity in academia in those days," Don said. He got the job because they needed someone to direct their technical communication program and mentor faculty.

Auburn University eventually came calling, offering to hire Don as a tenured professor so that he could build their technical communication program and develop faculty. He had really enjoyed working at Texas Tech, but his wife was ready to get out of that semi-arid flatland. So, he took the job, and stayed on at Auburn until he retired as Emeritus Professor of English in 2005.

When he got to Auburn, he told them that he didn't want to teach literature courses. "The department head was mystified—how could someone with a PhD in literature not want to teach literature courses?" These days, the attitude that he had back then is more common among technical communication professors, Don stated.

Don learned a lot from working in academia. "English departments are often the largest in any given university. That gives them a lot of power," Don said. He thinks that it's fine for a technical communication program to be within the English department if the literature people aren't dictating the content of technical communication courses. Once a program gets established, a pecking order invariably appears. Even when the technical communication program is moved out of the English department and allies with rhetoric and composition, there tends to be a pecking order. Typically, those professors who emphasize the practical side of technical communication tend to have a place near the bottom of the pecking order.

"Departments of rhetoric are overpopulated, and it appears to be showing in the job market," Don stated. "I think we should watch out and learn from what the departments of English and Rhetoric have done. They have produced more graduates than the job market can absorb. That's not the case with practitioners. I'm kind of a utilitarian in that matter. You have to have street credibility. The better faculty I know have that."

Don definitely thinks that it's important for professors to practice what they preach (meaning that they should have some practical technical communication experience in addition to teaching). "I don't think that practicing technical communication is subordinate to teaching, or even research. It's not a sideline or an alternative to summer teaching. Faculty in many other disciplines—music, art, anthropology, geology, marketing, theatre, veterinary medicine—engage in practice as a matter of course."

Professional Associations

Don benefitted from his memberships in professional organizations during his career. Some organizational memberships, however, were not meant to be. When he was in grad school, one of his papers was accepted by the Modern Language Association (MLA). However, just before their conference, he was informed that he had to be a member of the MLA to read his paper. The membership was pretty pricey, so he decided against paying up. As a result, he never read that paper.

On the other hand, some other organizations offered Don a better ROI. In 1969, he went to his first meeting of the Society of Technical Writers and Editors (STWE, a predecessor organization of STC). For the first time, he met people who were doing technical communication as teachers. He attended the STWE's annual conference and was exposed to many of the thought leaders in technical communication, such as John Walter, Hermann Weismann, John Harris, W. Earl "Web" Britton, Jay Gould, Tom Pearsall, and John Mitchell. He was amazed to find out how much research was going on in the field. That was the beginning of his professional identity as a technical communicator.

Eventually, the STWE became STC. Don is a Fellow, and he still maintains his STC membership.

He was a member of some other organizations, such as the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). "Herman Estrin and I edited their first book on technical communication," Don shared. But he doesn't maintain his membership with the Council anymore.

His Books

Don has written some high-quality books. I asked him which one I should buy, if I could buy only one. Don answered, "The only one in print is *How to Write for the World of Work* , now in its 7th edition. It was last published in 2005 by Thomson/Wadsworth. It's a little long in the tooth, but the principles are still basically sound." Don and his co-authors Thomas Pearsall and Elizabeth O. Smith updated the information in the book every few years for new editions.

Other than that, Don thought that a good choice might be his and Jeanette Harris's *The Simon & Schuster Guide to Writing* (Prentice Hall, 1994/1997). The book was very useful due to its focus on good writing principles across disciplines. However, Don said that when you are pigeonholed as a technical communicator, composition and rhetoric professors and directors of freshman composition sometimes don't view your books as being applicable to them. However, the book went into a second edition.

How Technical Communication Has Changed

Over the years that Don was updating *How to Write for the World of Work*, many things changed in technical communication. "Technology went all over the place in terms of writing, editing, gathering materials, and presenting information," Don stated. When he was first co-writing the book, if he focused too much on technology, he could easily, accidentally, exclude students at low-tech schools by discussing technology too much. Similarly, if he got too specific with hardware or software, students who used different platforms sometimes found it difficult to identify with the examples.

Don thinks that technology impacted the technical communication field in both good and bad ways. On the negative side, when writing tools started coming out, a lot of companies thought that they could simply provide subject matter experts with those tools and reduce their reliance on technical writers. "We certainly know that that's not true," Don said. In the profession itself, outsourcing has become a significant trend. Many organizations outsource the technical communication work, trying to cut costs. However, many of the off-shore writers have English as a second or perhaps even a third language. "While they are often whizbangers with the technology, they often have difficulty with English," Don said.

In Don's consulting experience, he came across many people who took a course in Dreamweaver or some other popular program, and then were hired as technical communicators. "In many cases, Human Resources is responsible for initial screenings when hiring technical communicators. However, they may have no idea what makes a good technical communicator. Instead, they look for experience with a particular communication technology."

"On the positive side," Don said, "computers have taken the pick and shovel work out of revisions. The first six or seven books I wrote were on a typewriter. If I made a mistake or wanted to amplify a point, I had to retype the whole page and sometimes several pages!"

Also, Don stated, you have the opportunity to integrate graphics into your work more smoothly. Twenty-five years ago, you had a professional for every part of the documentation process. Now you have to do the graphics and everything else, since you have the tools to do it. As Gerald Cohen, Don's co-author of *Creating Technical Manuals* (McGraw Hill, 1984), states: "Graphics are now equal partners with words."

What Makes a Good Technical Communicator

Don believes that just being familiar with a particular technology isn't what determines one's success as a technical communicator. That being the case, what *are* the qualities of a good technical communicator?

"There has been a several-decades-long debate over whether the best technical communicator is a subject-matter specialist whom you can teach how to communicate, or whether it's better to find a technical communicator who can learn the subject matter," Don said. "In my own experience, in high-tech military work, most tech writers were former military people who had operated the equipment or were knowledgeable about the systems they were writing about, but most couldn't write their way out of a paper bag."

You have to pay close attention to terminology. Don once had an experience where he was sure that a writer had used the word "fuze" as a Li'l Abner or Homer Simpson replacement for "fuse." However, he was working in pyrotechnics, and in pyrotechnics, "fuze" is the correct term. As a result, he looked silly when he "corrected" the spelling. As a writer, Don said, "You have to let the subject-matter expert win the close calls. As an editor, you have to let the writer win the close calls. You want the people you work with to remember you as positive, easy to work with, and please-able." He said that you have to avoid being perceived as authoritarian or dogmatic, and remain even-tempered. Don't assume as an editor, you know more than the writer how the document should read.

In regards to core technical communication competencies, Don identified several.

First, eagerness and ability to learn are critical. Not only is it important if you want to continue to develop writing and editing skills, but also to learn about the context of the organization in which you work or for which you are writing. You must always be learning new things, even if they don't seem to have an immediate application. Having an insatiable curiosity is critical.

Perseverance is also a key trait Don mentioned. You must keep things in order, ready to prod the project along. You must be diligent about detecting the smallest of errors, keeping your focus till the end. You have to persevere, but not be stubborn.

According to Don, a technical communicator must be able to adapt quickly. You have to be able to compose or edit a variety of documents. And when you get word that a document has to be in by next Thursday, you have to be ready to readjust your priorities to get that done.

You also have to be prepared to be a leader, even if you aren't formally tapped for that responsibility.

You have to be prepared to multi-task. As a writer, you not only must have a clear vision of what you want to say, but you must also understand what the audience needs and expects; as an editor, you must have the ability to hold the writer's and the audience's perspectives simultaneously.

You have to be ethical. "That's a tough one," Don said. "You have to be dependable. You have to do what you say you are going to do. You have to do what you're responsible for doing." And you must always try to avoid biased and other questionably ethical practices.

Don quoted from Robert Johnson's book, *User-Centered Technology: A Rhetorical Theory for Computers and Other Mundane Artifacts*: "'Technical communicators are people who have an affinity for and advocate for users.' You have to be able to do that."

Tech Comm Ethics

Don delved more deeply into technical communication ethics. He painted a picture of what ethics looks like (or doesn't look like) for a technical communicator.

"I can give some examples. There's always a classic situation of unfavorable details being hidden in plain sight." Something may warrant a caution or a warning, but it's not placed where the eye is attracted to it. Writers can bury unfavorable information or statements that reduce a company's liability in long passages, in footnotes, or in endnotes. They can use ambiguous headings, placing visuals in appendixes or annexes, far removed from where they are discussed. They can present important requirements, restrictions, and so forth in extremely small print (sometimes referred to as "mouse print").

"It's unethical not to catch errors," Don added. He said that graphics with errors are dishonest, even if they are not intentional.

Looking Back

There are a few things Don wishes that he had known or been able to do when he first started his career. He wishes that he had been smart enough to know when someone else really knew more about the subject matter than he did.

There were some process-related improvements he would make to his younger self, also. "You need an editing plan, and you need to communicate that plan. You need the ability to consider more than just the text on the page. You need to consider whom the text will impact, and who will impact that text."

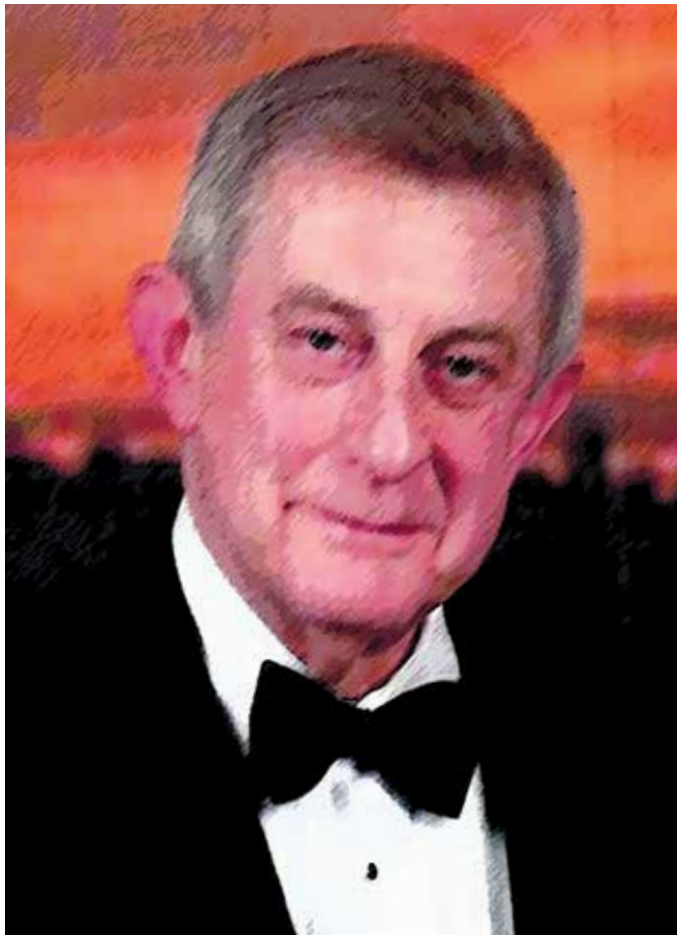
Don retired from Auburn in 2005 and is now living in a rural area about a mile from the Missouri River in central Missouri, within 20 miles of where he was born and grew up.

Looking back on his career, Don is not disappointed in the least. He summed it up by saying, "I think it's more than I hoped it would be."

DANIEL MADDUX *is a Technical Writer for Professional Datasolutions, Inc., in Temple, TX. He's a student in the MS Program in Technical Communication Management at the Mercer University School of Engineering.*

A Conversation with Jeffrey Hibbard: Reflections on a Successful Career

By BILLIE FRYS



JEFFREY HIBBARD DID NOT STUMBLE into technical communication by accident. After completing his Bachelor's degree in electrical engineering from Penn State in 1963, he was in the Career Services Office reviewing jobs, saw technical communication, and knew that it was something he was interested in. In fact, there was a technical writing job listed at IBM that was very intriguing. "IBM was considered a great place to work if you could get a job with them," he said. He interviewed with them on campus, and they offered him not one, but two job options: one in product publications and one in engineering publications. He took the latter. His job responsibilities included editing technical reports and journal articles in the Engineering and Development Laboratory in New York.

After a year and a half, Hibbard moved to corporate headquarters as a junior editor of the *IBM Journal of Research and Development*. Following this move, he spent his entire career with IBM journals, working his way up to Editor-at-Large. In 1972–1973, he became manager of corporate technical publications, which focused on the business side of three corporate publications. While management was not something he actively sought out, in this role, he learned the business side of journal publications, including circulation, distribution, printing, and graphic arts. Hibbard even went to printing school in New York City. Though he was successful as a manager and

received several promotions, he still thought, "This ain't good because it's no fun! It's all budgets, bureaucracy, and BS! I like the science and technical side of what I did when I was an editor." After some negotiations with IBM, Hibbard became Program Manager for Publishing Systems. In this role, he was in charge of developing software that could process scientific and engineering documents—a super version of what we would now call publishing software.

As Hibbard worked his way up the ladder, he finally became Senior Editor of the *IBM Journal of Research and Development* and loved this position. His favorite part of the job was to "wander around the company, world-wide, see what was going on and encourage employees to publish on their work." Hibbard comments, "The nice part of working for a large company in a very small well-defined position is that the career path was clear and easily laid out." Hibbard retired from IBM in 2002.

The Role of Professional Societies

Hibbard is a long-time member of the Society for Technical Communication (STC), holding all offices including being a Past President of STC. IBM really liked him to be involved with professional organizations, and encouraged him to speak at colleges, universities, and other organizations to help elevate IBM's name. Hibbard notes that being involved with STC was "good for him, good for IBM, and good for STC."

Hibbard was also involved with the Institute of Scientific and Technical Communicators (ISTC), the largest United Kingdom body representing information development professionals. He was also the STC delegate to Intecom and was the program chair for the Forum 2000 Conference in London. He says that the nice part of being involved with ISTC was that it helped him connect with other technical communication professionals internationally.

His best memory from STC was during the mid-1980s when he was President. During his tenure, the STC office made the transition into personal computers, which was a huge accomplishment. Additionally, when he was president-elect, there was a new Executive Director on board, and they were able to "grow up together," in a sense.

Understanding the Technical Communication Field

Hibbard notes three differences in technical communication today from when he started in the field. The main difference is directly related to technology and the monumental evolution.

1. Tools you can use yourself (email, Internet, etc.). Users now have access to all the world's knowledge, and that means there is not much you can't find out.
2. The skillset for the end-user has changed, also. "We must think about how they now have instant information tools available to them. Previously, you had to know; now you don't have to know, you just have to know how to find out."

   This is really a sociological difference. "Technical communication now has a lot higher standing than it used to. When I started, it was hard to convince people you were any more than a comma pusher. And now, most places have a respect for what a technical communicator can do for them." He notes that the members of the profession have helped us get to this point: "by virtue of their diligence they have gained credibility." Also, the need for our field has grown substantially. "Back in the day, we didn't have the respect for the end-user that we do now. Your job was to make them want what you have. Now to stay in business, companies must make the user happy."
3. Science has advanced more in the last 20 years than all previous science put together. There's a huge demand to get that knowledge out in terms that the public can understand. You can no longer write a paper that only you and three other people can understand.

Key Traits of Successful Technical Communicators

As we discussed the different traits that make a successful technical communicator, Hibbard noted that he has witnessed four key traits that are all indicators of success in this field:

1. You have to know how to collaborate and be a good judge of people. Additionally, you must wrap around the personalities of the people you are working with, even if their personalities are different from yours or are difficult to handle. There is a key ability to draw information out of people without aggravating them, and that is learned over time.
2. Let the other person have your way. Persuade the person that you are working with to do what you want by making them think it is their own idea.
3. Don't get stuck in "Analysis Paralysis"—know the difference between the pursuit of excellence and being too much of a perfectionist. There is a law of diminishing returns on every project. This is also a skill that can come with experience and confidence as someone grows into their career.
4. No matter where you are in your career progression—beginning, middle, or end—have a mentor. There is always something you can learn from someone else. Additionally, if you have something to offer, you should be a mentor as well.

International Technical Communication

One important aspect of Hibbard's work was done internationally. He worked with presenters from 20+ countries on an international conference program, with professional organizations, and with IBM employees around the world. His main advice for working in technical communication internationally is that sometimes you have to play the referee between cultures. With peer-reviewed articles, he had to recognize that the culture of the author and reviewer don't always match. As the editor, he had to realize the differences between cultures/countries and find middle ground. For example, if you are working with a Japanese peer reviewer and a Scandinavian author, the Japanese reviewer might make what seem to be minor suggestions to address an issue that is actually very concerning and must be addressed before publication. It's the editor's job to understand how cultural norms can impact the review process.

Hibbard reflected on a few cultural mishaps that happened during his tenure, saying, "My career was far from a series of perfect achievements. But what they say is true: you learn more from your mistakes than from doing things right." The more you work with different cultures, the better you become at navigating these differences.

Reflecting Back on a Successful Career

When asked about what he wished he had known when he started in technical communication, Hibbard said, "It was always a constant learning process, which is how it should be." He then laughed and said, "I would have known a lot better and a lot faster! One regret is that I never really published anything under my own name besides a few journal articles. I might have one good book in me, but I've never found the time to take a crack at it, and I often wonder what would have happened if I had found the time."

Hibbard's expectations when starting in the field were to pay off his college loans, make a decent living, and make enough money to not starve to death. Hibbard says, "My goals then were pragmatic and short term. In the end, I also got to see the world, meet some good people, and had some fun along the way, so I'm pretty happy with my career. Also, as they say, this isn't over just yet!"

Hibbard parted by giving a few pieces of advice for someone just starting in the field:

1. Master basic skills such as a strong command of the English language.
2. Develop communication skills, including a willingness to attend to detail without overdoing it, respect for other people, and learning how to collaborate. These interpersonal skills are just as important as writing and communication skills.
3. Don't worry too much about tool knowledge—the half-life of tool knowledge is about a year. "You can be great at some tool, but that means you are great at littering the world with crap. Do worry about the fundamental skills; these capabilities are forever!"

Hibbard had a very successful career as a technical communicator for IBM spanning nearly 40 years. His contributions to the scientific world, profession, and the many people from across the globe he crossed paths with have been very significant.

BILLIE FRYS *is the Director of Communications and Marketing at the Mercer University School of Law. She received her MS in Technical Communication Management from Mercer University School of Engineering in May 2017.*

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A Conversation with Richard Hodgkinson: Accessible Design for Persons with Disabilities

By ALLEN BROWN | *STC Member*

BEFORE HIS RETIREMENT, Richard Hodgkinson specialized in helping IBM ensure that its products were accessible to persons with disabilities. He is a Fellow of the United Kingdom's Institute for Scientific and Technical Communicators (ISTC). In 2012, Richard received the International Electrotechnical Commission 1906 Award for "inspiring leadership and service as convenor of the Working Group 2 for the Joint Technical Committee of the International Organization for Standardization and International Electrotechnical Commission." Put more simply, Richard's working group was responsible for devising documentation standards for the engineering of software and systems.

Richard lives in the town of Chandler's Ford on the central south coast of England, near Southampton and Winchester. I interviewed him in March 2017.

Hereditary Talent

As a boy, Richard Hodgkinson liked drawing. He came by his talent naturally, as his grandfather was a professional sign maker, or in Richard's words, "a sign-writer," sketching and painting signs by hand. His uncle, who died in 2001, was the Australian Frank Hodgkinson, an artist of some renown during and after World War II.

Richard's affinity for drawing led him to Southampton College of Art. He earned a diploma after a three-year period of study, choosing graphic arts over fine arts because he thought his employment prospects would be better. After graduation, he went to work for a local design firm, Studio 63, to which IBM outsourced some of its work. After one year of working for Studio 63, he learned of an opening at IBM for a graphic draftsman. Thinking that this might be a good opportunity, he applied and was hired.

He considered himself "very fortunate" to land a job with a company like IBM. Such an opportunity was not common at the time for art school graduates.

Early Years with IBM

As an art school graduate, Richard couldn't have joined IBM at a more opportune time. In the late-1950s, Thomas Watson Jr. became the company's CEO. Watson considered "good design to be good business." As evidence of this focus on design, Richard explained that Watson recruited and hired Eliot Noyes, an architect and curator of industrial design at New York's Museum of Modern Art. Noyes was among several design luminaries who influenced the company over the years, including Charles and Ray Eames (the Eames chair); Paul Rand, who designed the company logo; and Edward Tufte, who published a seminal book, *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information*, in 1983. As my interview with Richard progressed, it became clear to me how IBM's emphasis on good design served him well in his long career with the company.

In his early years with IBM, Richard's design work included products for both internal and external communication. They included letterhead, newsletters, and product packaging, as well as posters and graphics for trade show exhibitions. In the 1960s and 1970s, one of IBM's important products was the Selectric typewriter. It was known for its rotating type element known as a "golf ball" or "typeball." Businesses that purchased the Selectric had to call upon engineers to remove it from its packaging and install it. To ease this burden, boost sales, and save money, IBM wanted to simplify the Selectric's packaging and provide instructions so that secretaries could themselves install the machines without the aid of IBM customer engineering staff.

Richard was assigned to this project, which was initiated by the company's customer set-up (CSU) program. He traveled to Amsterdam to develop and refine what became known as "wordless instructions" for installing the Selectric typewriter. Part of the challenge with solving the design problem included altering the packaging's configuration of bolts that affixed the typewriters to the box. To remedy these challenges, he worked with a human factors engineer to develop and test various iterations of wordless instructions. To ensure that actual users would be able to follow the instructions, they recruited and paid secretaries to test them. The third round of instructions was successful. The wordless instructions not only eliminated the need for IBM personnel to install the machines, but they also avoided translation costs for the company, which operated a massive plant in Amsterdam that manufactured and shipped Selectric typewriters across Europe, Africa, and the Middle East.

Richard said that he still had a copy of these instructions, which were designed to rest atop the Selectric typewriters in their boxes. He held up the instructions to his laptop's camera so that I could see them. I was astonished to find that they were the size of a wall poster—and to see how much they resembled instructions so common today for installing any number of devices, including printers. When I asked him whether human factors labs and "wordless instructions" were common at the time, he replied that IBM was really "at the vanguard" with such innovation, exploring how customers responded to and interacted with products and systems. His "wordless instructions" were so innovative that he published an article about the process for developing them in a 1982 edition of the *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*.

After our conversation, I acquired a copy of the article and became particularly fascinated by graphic images of women following the steps to unpack and install the Selectric typewriter. The instructions were designed to remove the intimidation factor and to send a clear message to women: Not only can you use this typewriter, but you can also unpack and install it.

Figure 1. IBM Selectric wordless instructions

I asked Richard about the similarities between artists and engineers. He said that he considered both to be "creative types" interested in both the aesthetics and usability of design. But freedom with creativity for both artists and engineers can have its limits: he stressed that IBM maintained strict corporate design guidelines that, while aiding him in his design choices, were also constraining to him and others, particularly with colors and typefaces.

Designing Icons for IBM

Over time, Richard's work at IBM evolved. As IBM began to develop computers for both business and personal use, he was assigned to design icons that became integral to the graphical user interfaces that enhanced the usability and functionality of personal computers. I asked him whether in those early years he recognized his role and contributions to the company as one of a technical communicator. He responded that such a notion really "wasn't on my radar at the time."

In his new role, IBM engineers would enlist his skills as a graphic designers to design icons for both hardware and software. To design the icons, he would schedule meetings with the software engineers, ask lots of questions, and try to understand the essence of the task that the icon would represent. Richard stressed that he sought to understand "the prime purpose of the icon." Once he elicited this information from the engineer, he'd try to develop a "visual metaphor" for the icon that would resonate with the user.

As an example of a visual metaphor for an icon, he mentioned a mock-up of a piggy bank that a colleague of his conceptualized. The icon or image of a piggy bank was meant to convey the concept of "saving a file." The piggy bank icon was abandoned, he explained, because users were not able to associate "saving money" with "saving a file" and because pigs in some cultures are considered unclean animals. Icons that serve as metaphors, therefore, must help users intuitively understand the tasks they can accomplish, and they must conform to the cultural norms in all of the countries where they are used.

I asked Richard about his working relationship with IBM software engineers. Did they ever display any level of condescension toward him as a graphic designer? Without hesitation, he responded that he had always enjoyed positive, mutually respectful relationships with engineers and that they had always valued his contributions. He said that once he established a reputation for designing icons that aided in the functionality and usability of the product, his credibility was never questioned. His icon designs were well received, and engineers appreciated his ability in making them stylistically consistent. I could easily discern that it was not only his talent and skill that earned him respect with his engineer colleagues, but that his wit and affable nature also helped him forge collaborative working relationships. Richard is a likable guy with a clever sense of humor.

He expressed that he had always been interested in symbol design. Hence, his work with icons was particularly gratifying to him in his IBM career. Technology in those early years, he was quick to point out, afforded him a limited color palette and a limited number of pixels. Over time, however, technology advanced and design options expanded. In developing icons for IBM's computer interfaces, he said that he found the *Symbol Sourcebook: An Authoritative Guide to International Graphic Symbols* by Henry Dreyfuss to be enormously helpful.

In his work with symbols and icons, Richard began to develop an awareness of and sensitivity to cultural influences on graphical representations of information. IBM was then—as now—a global corporation. He therefore recognized the need to make conscious and intentional design choices tailored to the needs of users around the world. For example, colors and images that are perfectly acceptable in the western hemisphere may convey different meanings in other parts of the world. Such business considerations are imperative if your products are going to be successful and profitable. IBM was among the first international corporations to develop effective approaches to conducting business in the global marketplace and to incorporate design elements that appealed to various cultural norms.

In his work at IBM Hursley Park, he recalled collaborating with human factors engineers who tested and evaluated competitor products, including those by Xerox (its Star Workstation) and Apple, whose systems were the first to incorporate a graphical user interface (GUI). I later discovered that Hursley Park was originally an 18th century estate, the centerpiece of which was Hursley Mansion. During World War II, aircraft, including the Vickers Supermarine Spitfire, which fought off the German *Luftwaffe*, were designed at Hursley Park. IBM later acquired the mansion and the estate's ample acreage to develop a major software development center that still operates today.

Over time, Richard's work with icons expanded, and his role began to encompass animated tutorials for using software. The software included early versions of workplace productivity applications for creating business graphics, such as bar graphs and pie charts. He developed tutorials to teach users how they could use the technology to prepare and deliver formal presentations to executives and clients. When I asked Richard whether he would characterize his work as more technical communication or user experience, he replied that he considered it to be both. He felt that his work with icons not only helped users understand how to perform complex tasks, but that it enhanced the overall user experience. Icons that serve as shortcuts for complex keystroke combinations can make technology more inviting and less intimidating. Though innovative decades ago, we take such icons for granted today.

Richard said that during the 1980s and in the early-1990s, he devoted about 80 percent of his working hours to designing icons. I asked him about any challenges

that he or IBM faced with claiming ownership of icons as proprietary intellectual property. He recalled a major lawsuit in the 1980s that never ultimately resolved any copyright claims. After the lawsuit, icons became fair game and anyone and everyone used them, regardless of the company that originated the design. The main benefit of this was to aid consistency for users across various software platforms.

Traditional Technical Communicator Role

In his later years at IBM, Richard's work gravitated toward that of traditional technical communication. He began developing and writing standards that would come to define effective icon design and software documentation. In this role, his contributions were situated within IBM's Information Development/User Technologies Departments. At the time, legislation aimed at affording persons with disabilities equal opportunity came to the fore, chiefly the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Mandates imposed by these regulations affected not only business and industry, but also public education, public transportation, and perhaps most importantly for Richard, government agencies.

In response to the legislation, he began to specialize in the accessibility of information communication technology (ICT) for persons with disabilities. Federal agencies in the United States were required to provide and procure ICT that could be used by persons with disabilities. US federal government agencies were major IBM customers—and as federal contractor, IBM was (and is) subject to regulations that are far more stringent than for non-federal contractors. IBM had to ensure that its products met or exceeded prescribed accessibility standards.

As he concluded his career with IBM, the European Union introduced Mandate 376, which stressed "design for all" in ICT. In the years following his retirement, he continued to work on standards, including those of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and other worldwide federations concerned with creating standards around the use of technology, such as the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) and the European Telecommunications Standards Institute (ETSI).

I asked him about the complexities of developing international standards, and he said that arriving at consensus typically takes at least three years, usually more. Sometimes when committees and work groups take too long to codify a standard, it can be cancelled and the committees disbanded. In years past, members of these international committees traveled and convened in an agreed-upon location where they discussed and debated the intricacies of these written standards. These committees now commonly collaborate using Web conferencing tools, eliminating some of the need for lengthy and expensive travel.

To initiate a standard, participating countries must vote on the need to develop it. When I asked him how binding such standards are, he explained that standards are those to which you "shall" adhere, whereas guidelines are those that you "should" follow. Richard's contributions to ISO standards earned him the status of Fellow with the ISTC. From 1998 until 2013, he wrote a regular column in the ISTC journal, *The Communicator*, about developments in international standards for icons, symbols, software documentation, and IT accessibility.

Reflecting on a Long Career

As we concluded the interview, I asked Richard about the advances in technology he had observed and experienced during his 30-plus-year IBM career. He explained that these developments were so much a part of his life that they seemed like a natural evolution. He recalled lugging around laptops that were as heavy as bricks and transporting bulky, awkward portable printers. Although he is fascinated and delighted by the efficiencies and conveniences afforded by technology, he is concerned that human beings are spending far too much time with their smartphones, tablets, and laptops, but not enough with each other—and not enough enjoying all that nature offers. As a man with lots of grandchildren, he is particularly concerned about the effects such technology may have on those still in their formative years.

After our conversation, I pondered all of the technological developments that Richard had not only witnessed but had helped orchestrate. In his work with IBM over three decades, he observed the evolution from a manufacturing economy to one that employed "knowledge workers" like himself who were instrumental in ushering in the information age. He clearly enjoyed his career at IBM, admitting during our conversation that he often lost track of time during the work day, spending far more time at the office than either his wife or children appreciated.

Cheers to this former IBMer for a career of rewarding and enjoyable work with the global powerhouse known affectionately as Big Blue.

ALLEN BROWN *is Managing Director of Operations for Bridges from School to Work at the Marriott Foundation for People with Disabilities in Bethesda, MD. He recently completed his MS in Technical Communication Management at the Mercer University School of Engineering.*

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Rainmaker:

A Conversation with Ken Cook

By KELLY SMITH | *STC Member*

KEN COOK, a Fellow and Past President of the Society for Technical Communication (STC), is also President and CEO of Ken Cook Co., a family business founded by his father in 1944. In addition, he is a member of more than a dozen organizations and currently serves as treasurer for the National Association of Service Managers (NASM). Much of his career has been spent drumming up business from contacts he has made through these organizations.

Ken took a circuitous route to becoming President of Ken Cook Co. His first job was preparing procurement specifications for components of missile systems and test procedures at General Dynamics. He worked on documenting the Standard and Redeye missiles, and wrote reports on climate issues. He left General Dynamics to join Ken Cook Co. as a project manager and eventually moved into a position as Vice President of sales and marketing, where he helped write marketing materials. Even though he was VP, he would edit the brochures that came out of the marketing group.

He left Ken Cook Co. for a while to work for a Dutch technical communication company, becoming their VP of U.S. operations. He returned to Ken Cook Co. in 1975 and became Executive Vice President, then President in 2001, eventually buying out his three sisters and mother, and taking over full ownership of the company in 2005.

Early Life

From a young age, Ken had a strong interest in music and played the cello. He also loved stereo equipment, kit building, and wires. Ken's mother was a concert pianist. and his father was the founder of Ken Cook Co. As a child, Ken would hide in the backseat of his dad's car to sneak into work with him on Saturdays. While there, he would "help" the employees who were working on things like "page negatives, art boards, and printing." This brought him into close contact with the type of work his father did and inspired a lifelong interest in technical communication.

When he was in high school, Ken thought he might pursue a musical career like his mother or a career in the ministry. After his minister told him, "If you don't have a calling, you'd better not go," Ken decided to pursue his first love and become an electrical engineer, with the knowledge that someday he might go to work for the family business.

Ken's Technical Communication Career

His first position was as technical writer for General Dynamics' missile division in Pomona, CA. Ken's technical background helped in his pursuit of a technical communication career. He said, "In my business, a technical background and interest in how things work is imperative. Probing and asking applicable questions—interviewing skills—are important." Ken was adamant that to be a good technical communicator, you have to have a strong foundation in technology. He continued, "There are some things I'm on a soapbox about [such as] technical

background." Ken said that even without an engineering degree, "You need to have a love of knowing how things work." In the 1960s and 70s, the field was "60 percent male and 40 percent female writers. Now it's more 80 percent female and 20 percent male." Ken attributes this change to the swing from documenting things (such as engines and other mechanical devices) to documenting software. He said, "Women were attracted to software documentation," and he felt that this phenomenon contributed to their rise in numbers in the field over the past 30 years.

I asked Ken if he thought industry background is important for a technical communicator. He was emphatic. "Yes. Milwaukee School of Engineering requires some basic engineering courses as part of their technical communication degree program. Do you select a subject matter expert and teach her or him how to write? Or a technical writer and teach her or him about the subject? I go with the subject matter expert or at least a writer who can address the subject proficiently." Ken said that people can have an interest in a field and that is sometimes enough to make them effective technical communicators in that field. He cited the example of a writer he employs who previously worked at Case. The man knew all about heavy equipment and was later able to channel that knowledge into documenting a wide range of equipment.

Technology Then vs. Now

Ken described the manual process used in his early career in the following way. "We didn't have all the tools we have today." At General Dynamics and Ken Cook Co., they would hand write or copy from other documents. To replicate things, they used mimeograph and a thermal fax. They had a special daylight window for natural light so that the illustrators could have adequate light to make exploded views from 2D drawings. "Now we're down to just one illustrator. They obtain models from 3D CAD systems.

"When I started, you did handwritten text, copied standard information, and turned it over to a typist." It was then "passed along to a proofer, returned for check, then an illustrator developed illustrations to support your text. It then went to a paste–up artist (who literally pasted the text and illustrations on a sheet)," integrating the illustrations with the text. The work then went "back to the proofer/editor and was eventually replicated."

Today, Ken says, "writers have an array of software tools to create, pick up standard text, pick up illustrations from a CAD system, and either do the page layout, or pass it on to a desktop specialist for layout. We also have many jobs in the user experience arena. The University of Washington Human Centered Design and Engineering [Department] is leading the way on this concept."

"Software tools are available to help you with the way you word things to make sure it's standardized terminology that's used in that business. This type of software is used by Volvo and a couple of others in Germany."

Ken said he wishes that Google—and the Internet in general—had existed when he started working in technical communication. "If you are writing about a piece of equipment and want to know more about a procedure, you can go to the client's website and can also look at related equipment. We did not have that intelligence when I started."

Project management tools have also improved. Ken Cook Co. uses a document management system designed in house to track document reviews. This allows for the electronic movement of files for development, review, and quick digital printing.

Asked how he thinks technology has influenced the technical communication industry, for good or ill, Ken said, "Obviously for good! There are so many changes in a product during the development stages that it is difficult to keep up with incorporating them in time for a release to production."

There is a downside to this speed, however. Ken described a product safety and compliance seminar where they held a round table with 10 publications managers. "In our roundtable discussions with publication managers, this challenge is constant. Having the tools to quickly incorporate changes is a must!" The publications manager from a construction company said his team couldn't keep up with the engineering changes. "Because we communicate so quickly electronically, engineers think the changes can be made to the documents just as quickly."

International Experience

Ken "worked for a Dutch technical communication business with offices in Amsterdam, Milan, Frankfurt, and Leicester, England. There were cultural differences and some procedural changes in development, but all worked in the DIN standard." (DIN is the Deutsches Institut für Normung e.V. or German Institute for Standardization.)

He said, "Ken Cook Co. works with a number of international companies, and most of our effort is to re–write their translations from their language to English and also to incorporate safety messages if hazards exist in operating the equipment."

One interesting factor of working overseas was seeing the different cultures in action at factories. In Germany, employees wore white coats and management was very structured. In England, it was just the opposite, while Italy was somewhere in between.

Some issues that arise when writing for an international audience include converting between metric and English—the European market wants metric first—and paper sizes.

The DIN standard in Europe is A4, which is a little narrower and longer than the U.S. standard of 8 ½ x 11-inch paper.

Ken pointed out that there are members of STC from various countries including Sweden, Japan, and China who come to the annual conferences. He also meets engine manufacturers from all over Europe. "A common issue is with marketing managers. In other countries, they write the procedures in English, but they need to be edited and re-written because they are not understandable to a U.S. audience."

The Importance of Professional Organizations

Ken is a member of more than a dozen professional organizations. Some are associated with technical communication, others with the industries that his company does business in, and one, the St. Andrew's Society of Milwaukee, is associated with his Scottish heritage. Ken said that he wears a kilt, but despite his musical background, he can't play the bagpipes.

Ken says that becoming a member of a variety of professional organizations can enhance your career or business through networking. It has enabled him to make business contacts with a number of companies who are now Ken Cook Co. clients. For example, through STC, Ken met a representative from Volvo in Sweden, and Ken Cook Co. became the technical communication resource for Volvo Cars in North America. In addition to professional development, Ken said that STC is "the most friendly" of all the organizations he belongs to. He has mentored younger STC members, helped them with résumés, and helped them find positions. He also received the STC President's Award and supports the Senior Advisory Council of STC, a group made up of all Past Presidents.

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Ken Cook Co. serves manufacturers who are members of the Association of Equipment Manufacturers (AEM), including John Deere, their largest account. Ken Cook Co. got Bobcat as a client through a referral from STC and his association with AEM, where his company is an Associate Member. Again, contact via professional organizations led to a contract.

Ken is a Past President of the National Coalition for Aviation and Space Education, which he joined following the legacy of his father who was a passionate aviator and owned six airplanes. Ken's office overlooks an airfield. Because of this connection, Raytheon and Beechcraft solicited his help in providing educational materials to get students interested in a career in aviation. Ken has presented awards to educators for their contributions to aviation education, and has partnered with astronauts Buzz Aldrin and Bonnie Dunbar.

Ken's other memberships include the American Society for Training & Development (now the Association for Talent Development), the National Defense and Industry Association, the Society of Automotive Engineers, the National Association of Service Managers, the Society of Service Executives, the National Marine Manufacturers Association, and the American Boat and Yacht Council.

Advice for the Novice Technical Communicator

When asked what advice he had for a novice technical communicator, Ken said, "Meet and talk with technical writers and managers. A good place to start is with a local STC chapter. What are their experiences and challenges, and do they like their job?"

He said that the STC chapter of which he's a member tries to be welcoming to new technical communicators. "It's hard to get that within a company unless there is a pool of writers. I think STC is an excellent place to start. Is there anyone you can identify as a publication manager to dialog with? Maybe that person can become your mentor. Some chapters have formal mentoring programs."

Ken said the most valuable skill he learned early in his career was patience—how to deal with the politics of a job. He said, "I started as a technical writer for missile systems at General Dynamics. I had to get six signatures on the document, and the stakeholders did not always agree with each other. That was a constructive learning process." I asked Ken how he overcame this issue. He said, "I was patient enough to listen to what the issues were." If that was not enough, he would bring the disagreeing parties together or bring their management in. He said he didn't expect this kind of disagreement to happen—he was surprised, but he got through it by trial and error,

and sometimes humor worked. He commented that this kind of soft skill is not something you always learn at a university.

Ken started as a technical writer then moved on to lead writer, project manager, vice president, and president. "There is a path to leadership if that is your goal in life. Some writers avoid the leadership aspiration because they just like to write!"

Even now that he is president of the company, he still writes proposals (he is helping the NASM get sponsorship to fund a learning management system). He also writes board reports and communications with clients, which he describes as sometimes being "a delicate type of written effort."

Conclusion

When asked if his technical communication career had been everything he'd hoped for, Ken said, "It has been a rewarding and fulfilling experience for me. My goal to become President, CEO, and owner of Ken Cook Co. has been achieved. I am having fun and enjoy seeing employees develop, achieving their career goals."

Although his Bachelor's degree was in electrical engineering and his Master's was in business economics, Ken said that the best education he got was public speaking and being on the debate team. "These are valuable assets to have as a leader. I address large audiences and smaller groups and am aware of the presentation skills that I have, and I put them to good use."

Ken said that his doctor recently asked, "Are you going to retire any time soon?"

Ken said he was considering it.

His doctor asked, "Are you having fun?"

Ken said, "Yes."

His doctor asked, "Then why the hell do you want to retire?"

It sounds like Ken plans to stay in the technical communication field for a while yet. He told me, "I've always been the rainmaker in business, and I want to focus more on that."

KELLY SMITH *is a Gold Member of STC and works as a Technical Writer for Dart Container Corporation. She is a student in the MS Program in Technical Communication Management at the Mercer University School of Engineering.*

"I MET MANY OF MY FAVORITE PEOPLE THANKS TO STC"
"When I first joined STC and started going to meetings, I quickly realized that STC provided some of the best networking and professional development opportunities for our profession. I was coming from working in a veterinary clinic, which is a totally different world, and I didn't have a lot of contacts in technical communication. Today, most of my work friends and some of my closest personal friends are a direct result of being an active volunteer in STC."
Kit Brown-Hoekstra
MY NAME IS KIT BROWN-HOEKSTRA AND
I'M AN STC MEMBER
STC.org/renew

A Conversation with Stephanie Rosenbaum:

Technical Communication Entrepreneur

By SHAMREEN (SHAMMY) PRADHAN

I HAD THE OPPORTUNITY to chat with Stephanie Rosenbaum, CEO of TecEd, about her professional career progression from her accidental start in technical communication to her current role at TecEd. We discussed challenges she has faced, changes within the industry, and professional societies that have impacted her career.

Career Beginnings

Shammy: Thanks for taking the time to chat with me, Stephanie. I am sure you have gotten an idea of my questions for you from our prior correspondences, so we can dive right into it. My first question is why did you choose to go into the technical communication field, and was it your first choice?

Stephanie: Oh my goodness. I didn't even know technical communication existed when I got my first job in it. I had been working my way through college as a biochemistry lab technician because my dad was a chemist and I had learned in high school how to work in a lab. I couldn't make ends meet working part time, and I was an out of state student, so I took a gap year, which at that time would qualify me for in-state tuition.

I started looking for a full-time job as a lab technician, and instead I found a company that was looking for a technical writer. This was interesting because I was moderately technical, and I was a good writer, so I said, let's find out. The hiring manager gave me an assignment. He gave me a sales brochure and asked me to turn it into a technical brochure, so I did that and got the job, despite my not yet having a degree. It wasn't until two or three years later that the hiring manager let it slip that the other candidates either refused to complete the assignment or wrote badly.

So, I ended up falling into technical communication. I was very fortunate because it combined two things I liked very much and was good at: technical subjects and communicating.

The Importance of Professional Organizations

Shammy: I understand that you're a member of the Society for Technical Communication (STC) and the IEEE Professional Communication Society (IEEE-PCS). Which other professional organizations have you belonged to, and which ones have provided the most professional and personal satisfaction, and why?

Stephanie: I have belonged to the Human Factors and Ergonomics Society (HFES) in the past. I belong to the ACM SIG on Design of Communication (SIGDOC), which is similar to IEEE-PCS. I belong to the ACM SIG on Computer Human Interface (SIGCHI). I am a Charter Member of the User Experience Professionals Association (UXPA). I'm also an STC Fellow and an IEEE Life Senior Member.

Which organizations provided the most satisfaction depended on where I was in my career. STC was incredibly supportive to me in my early career, and I couldn't have done without it. I was very active in the Society, and I learned a huge amount from my colleagues. It is less professionally and personally satisfying to me now because I'm in a niche part of our profession, and STC concentrates more on other aspects of technical communication.

For me now, the user experience groups are more relevant. ACM SIGCHI varies in satisfaction and relevance because, although I'm very much a research-based practitioner (that is, I keep up with the literature and do rigorous work), I'm still not in academia. The ACM special interest groups are more focused toward academics. UXPA was founded in birds-of-a-feather sessions at other conferences. Practitioners were finding that they were not getting as much support and personal and professional satisfaction from SIGCHI and HFES as they had hoped, so they started a professional society for practitioners. Each of these organizations has provided a lot of satisfaction at certain times, and all have been rewarding.

Domain Knowledge and Technical Communicators

Shammy: Do you think that an industry background is important to a technical communicator? For example, how could a technical writer who does not have knowledge about medicine work well on a medical manual?

Stephanie: I think there are two sides to it. One side is what an employee of mine once very well expressed as "my job is to ask the questions of ignorance." There is some benefit to being an outsider because you are then more likely to look at the subject in the way your audience views it. It's not necessary to be an expert in the domain. There may even be drawbacks to being an expert because then you make assumptions about what your target audience knows and doesn't know.

That said, if you know nothing about the subject, you waste people's time, yours included, trying to get a good manual written. It behooves you to read background information and get as familiar as you can with the domain within whatever amount of time is appropriate for the job you're doing. If you are in a consultancy like mine, where you're working on projects for 20 different domains over the course of a year, then you're satisficing. You're looking for how quickly you can research a topic without embarrassing yourself in front of a client and without wasting the time of the engineers or physicians or other domain experts that you're interviewing—but also bearing in mind how you can get the job done in the available schedule and budget.

An Evolving Career

Shammy: How did your role as a technical communicator evolve over your career?

Stephanie: Dramatically, because I started out doing technical communication for one company's technical products; then I went back to work as a lab technician for a couple of years. I next took a job doing technical communication for a research lab at a university. After that, I realized there was a need for a consulting company that did technical communication because computers were becoming more widely used in the industry. In the early 1960s, you were lucky to be near a computer if you didn't have a PhD in electrical engineering. By the late 1960s, computers were making their way into business and were becoming productized. A lot of people who didn't have technical PhDs wanted take advantage of computers, so what was needed were translators—people who could talk to engineers and then create information that ordinary people in business could use.

So I started my consulting firm to provide this worthwhile service. That was a dramatic evolution. I was a one-person company instead of working in a department of a small company or a 3,000-person research lab. At its largest, my consultancy, TecEd, made its way up to 40 employees.

In the 1980s, we began to realize that it wasn't good enough to write an excellent user guide for a product that was really hard to use. People would not necessarily spend the

time to read even good documentation to learn how to use these products. The next step was to evolve the products into being more usable and to apply communication skills such as creating understandable error messages, clear menus, and organized hierarchal structures of menus and commands to make a user interface easier to use. Almost all of the skills needed to improve product usability are related to technical communication, but we also started going to conferences and taking courses to learn more about user experience, human factors, and human-computer interaction. We started hiring more people with backgrounds in psychology. Now about 85% of our practice is user experience related, and the rest is traditional technical communication.

Shammy: Did you ever get involved in the design phase for products to avoid having a good manual for a product that was overly complicated to use?

Stephanie: We do now, but the level of involvement varies because I am running a consultancy. If I were working within a product company, that is exactly what I would be doing. I'd be involved at the early design phase doing the exploratory research that would help to find out the goals and activities of the target users. That information would then be translated into user interface specifications and then be implemented into the final product. Because we are a consultancy, we step in and out of the design process. Sometimes it's an afterthought, and sometimes the client realizes right from the get-go that they need user experience resources. Sometimes they do all their user experience work internally, but other times they recognize the benefit of adding a neutral third party to conduct design as well as research. You get less end-to-end involvement as a consultancy; you don't get none, but you get less.

The Evolving Profession

Shammy: What are some major differences you see in the jobs within the technical communication field today versus when you began your career?

Stephanie: When I began my career, technical communicators wrote manuals, and when computers became part of the business world, we wrote help systems. Now, technical communication touches every part of the user experience, and we can be responsible for a lot of it. Good user guides and good help systems are still needed, but working in concert with people to make good interfaces results in making the entire user experience better. Whatever instructional material is supporting the product, that's part of the user experience just like the product interface. So now in our field, you can specialize in any piece of that.

Shammy: Have you identified any core traits or characteristics that seem to be common among successful technical communicators?

Stephanie: Yes, a prime trait is organizational skill. The ability to take an amorphous mass of information and structure it in a way that makes sense is hugely important and underappreciated. The ability to interview is critically important. Like organizational skills, analytical skills are very important. A successful technical communicator also needs the ability to work at different levels. The ability to pay attention to all the details without losing sight of the broad picture is an important skill as well.

Shammy: Are there any resources that you currently use or have used in recent years that you wish had existed when you started working in technical communication?

Stephanie: When I started working in technical communication, Shammy, I used a typewriter, okay? So what has made the biggest difference is ….

Shammy and Stephanie: A computer!

Stephanie: And that's despite the fact that I knew how to program computers, but they weren't word processors. Anything that can be lumped under the old-fashioned label of word processor has made a huge difference because you can create a clean draft every time you change a document. Another resource I wish had existed in the past is online libraries such as ACM Digital Library and IEEE Xplore; the ability to research literature with my own laptop is huge. I don't have to go to the library anymore, or very rarely. I wish those two things had existed when I started in technical communication, but I would wish they had existed regardless of what profession I was in. Those are not things that have to do specifically with technical communication. Those are things that support all knowledge workers.

Shammy: How has technology influenced the technical communication industry, good and bad?

Stephanie: Earlier I talked about technology resources as being good influences. If I had to think about a bad influence, it's that too many people, both hiring managers and people in the profession, confuse the tool and the skill. The more technical tools there are, the more that confusion happens. You look at someone's résumé, and it lists 25 kinds of software that they use, but the résumé is badly written. And this is someone who is applying for a job as a writer! I'm glad people can use all this technology,

which will save them time and make them more productive, but if they don't also have good interviewing skills, good information organizing skills, and good communication skills, it won't matter how many different apps they use.

Unfortunately, it's easy to lose track of the fact that you need skills that have nothing to do with which tool you're using, but rather how good an interviewer you are or how well you organize the information. I can have every outlining tool in the world, but if I don't see how the parts of this website could more usefully fit together, then it doesn't matter how good a tree structure tool I'm using. The bad influence of technology is letting the tool trump the task, rather than using tools to be more productive at core skills.

Shammy: Have you ever done any technical communication work internationally? Are there any notable differences compared to the domestic field of technical communication?

Stephanie: Very little. I've done user research internationally, but I'm not bilingual. There are differences, because the user experience maturity model is different in different countries. Some countries have people working right at the cutting edge, and some countries are farther back on the maturity scale. But I haven't worked directly in technical communication internationally. My ability to do that would be limited because it would have to be for an organization which used English as its multinational communication language. I wouldn't be able to work to an adequate standard in another language.

Looking Back on a Career

Shammy: What do you wish you had known when you were first starting your career as a technical communicator?

Stephanie: I wish I had gotten to know about professional societies in the field sooner, because I worked in the field for probably five years before I learned about STC. I first heard of STC because someone in a different department in the company I was working for had submitted a manual to the STC publications competition.

Shammy: Was your career in technical communication everything you had hoped for? Why?

Stephanie: I'm probably the wrong person to answer that question because I didn't set out with specific goals. I set out to put myself through school. It's been exciting and rewarding, and I've reinvented my career probably a dozen times in the past 50 years. I'm not sorry technical communication has been my career, but I didn't have hopes for it, so I don't really think I can answer that.

Shammy: That is understandable. Most people I've spoken to have also accidentally fallen into the field. It makes sense that you didn't essentially have goals for it at the beginning because you didn't even know that you might end up in that kind of field.

Stephanie: That's right; no, I didn't. Here was this job that was going to let me support myself and help me qualify as an in-state student. Here was another job that would let me pay for my graduate school. I ended up liking the job, so I kept on doing it.

Shammy: What advice do you have for someone who is just starting to explore the field of technical communication and what it has to offer?

Stephanie: Probably to do what you're doing, which is talking to people in the field. Ask them about the strengths and the drawbacks. There are drawbacks. Although user experience has gotten more traction over the past few years, when you work in an engineering-driven organization, there's still a slight flavor of second-class citizen about someone who is not designing the guts of the product.

Also, technical communication is really interesting, but it's not necessarily glamorous. Once I was asked to talk at a communication career fair at a high school. There were two speakers preceding me; one was from a TV station and one was from a radio station. Each of them described how exciting it was to be a commentator and how they had hundreds of applications for every job opening. When it was my turn to speak, I said if instead you'd like the opportunity to choose among a dozen job offers, you might want to explore the field of technical communication. So, there's another trade-off: do you want make a big difference in a slightly less glamorous field, or do you want to be frustrated job hunting in a glamorous field?

I think technical communication is a really good career, in part because it has so many aspects. You can decide to concentrate on the more technical side, the visual side, the research side—they are all part of our profession. You can be a successful technical communicator and do an awful lot of different things. You can choose one of them or two of them, or you can rotate and evolve through them during your career. There's a huge opportunity for flexibility and growth.

SHAMMY PRADHAN *is a System Safety Engineer with Rockwell Collins Government Systems in Richardson, TX. She is a student in the MS Program in Technical Communication Management at the Mercer University School of Engineering.*

STC Communities and Staff Win APEX Awards

STC IS PROUD to announce that one STC community and the STC staff recently were named winners in APEX 2017, the 29th Annual Awards for Publication Excellence. APEX Awards are based on excellence in graphic design, editorial content, and the ability to achieve overall communication excellence. APEX Grand Awards honor the outstanding works in each main category, while APEX Awards of Excellence recognize exceptional entries in each of the individual categories. Out of over 1,300 entries, just 100 won APEX Grand Awards. This year, STC's *Technical Communication* journal (edited by Dr. Sam Dragga) won an APEX Grand Award for its 2016 Cover Competition.

Congratulations to the following other STC winners:

- **Northeast Ohio Chapter** (Sara Buchanan, Lynn Nickels, Jeanette Evans): APEX Award of Excellence in the category of Newsletters – Print
- **2015–2016 STC Salary Database:** APEX Award of Excellence in the category of One-of-a-Kind Publications.

Congratulations again to the winners!

For more information on the APEX Awards and a full listing of winners, visit *http://www.apexawards.com/*.

Nomination Process Opens for STC Academic Awards

STC RECOGNIZES INDIVIDUAL member achievement through several award programs. Below is information on the academic award programs and their deadlines.

Sigma Tau Chi and Alpha Sigma Honor Societies

STC sponsors two honorary societies for students, and this year the criteria for each have changed.

Membership in STX is an honor given to students enrolled in a program in technical communication, who have a cumulative grade point average of 3.5 or above, are *exemplary* in participation in STC, and demonstrate a potential for *significant* contribution to the profession.

Membership in AS is an honor given to students enrolled in a program in technical communication who have a cumulative grade point average of 3.5 or above, demonstrate *active* participation in STC, and have the potential to contribute to the profession.

Nominations are due by **2 October 2017**. Contact: Miles Kimball (*miles.kimball@gmail.com*).

Jay R. Gould Award for Excellence in Teaching Technical Communication

The Jay R. Gould Award honors the distinguished teaching career of Professor Gould and celebrates true academic mentorship, demonstrated by the personal and professional concern that great teachers extend to their students beyond the classroom.

The Gould award nominating committee is seeking nominees for the award. To be eligible, a nominee must have been a member of STC for at least 10 years and must have been involved in postsecondary education for at least 15 years. Current STC board members and members of the Gould award nominating committee are not eligible.

Nominations are due by **2 October 2017**. Contact: Pam Estes Brewer (*brewer_pe@mercer.edu*).

Ken Rainey Award for Excellence in Research

The Ken Rainey Award honors the distinguished research contributions of Dr. Rainey, a professor at Southern Polytechnic State University and an STC Fellow who produced major research studies that continue to provide ongoing benefit to both practice and teaching in the field of technical communication.

This award honors research that has made positive, significant contributions to technical communication practice and teaching. One award will be given each year to an STC member who has conducted a lifetime of quality research in the field or has completed a single high-quality empirical study or a set of related high-quality studies.

To be eligible for the award, a nominee must have been a member of STC for at least one year.

Nominations are due by **3 November 2017**. Contact: Sally Henschel (*sally.henschel@mwsc.edu*).

For more information on all of these awards and nomination forms, see *www.stc.org/membership/recognition/awards*.

Associate Fellow Recommendations Due 1 November 2017

EACH YEAR, STC members and communities have the opportunity to recommend senior members for the rank of STC Associate Fellow to the Associate Fellows Committee. This honor recognizes members' achievements in the field of technical communication, contributions to STC, or both.

Any senior member of STC may submit a nominee's application to the Associate Fellows Committee, including those who wish to apply on their own behalf. The committee reviews each nominee's application and contacts the identified references. Based on evaluation of the information collected, the committee forwards nominees to the STC Board of Directors for consideration. Those nominees receiving a two-thirds favorable vote from the board will receive the honor as long as their membership is in good standing and they meet the requirements as stated in the guidelines.

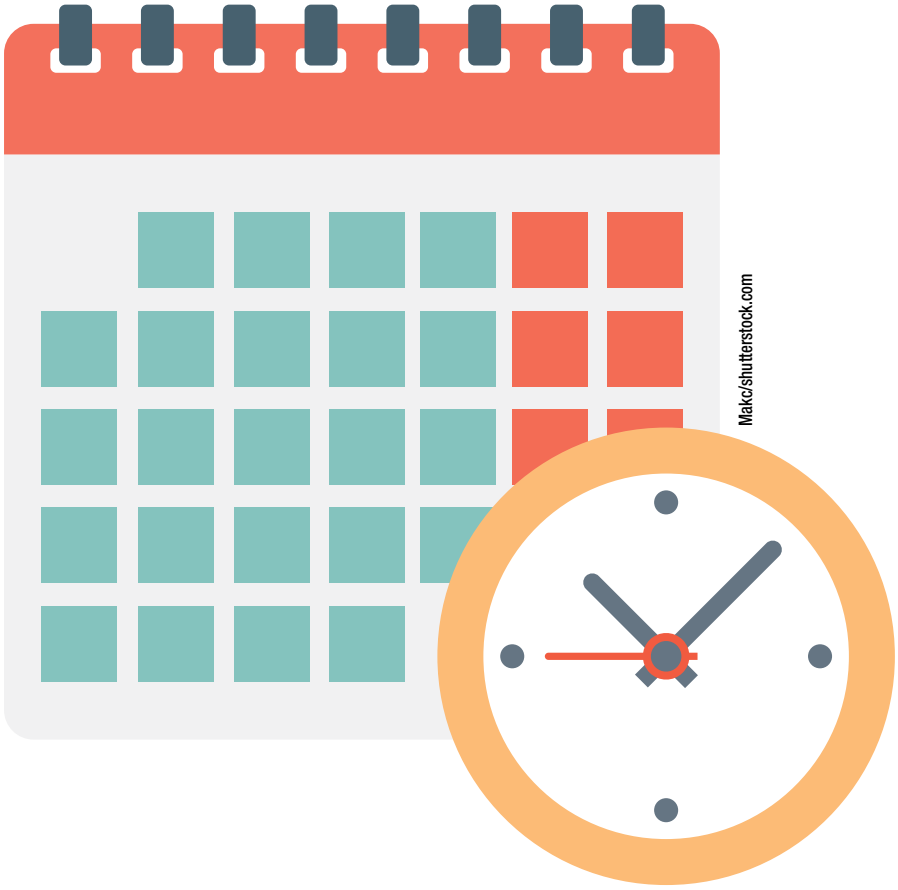
To be considered for selection as an Associate Fellow, the nominee must have been active in the field of technical communication for at least 15 years and have been a member of the Society for at least 10 years, as of the application submission deadline. They must also be members in good standing at the time of the application and at the time of the Honors Reception at the annual conference. But, most importantly, the nominee must have significant accomplishments in the following areas: done notable original work that has contributed to the advancement of the field, or made significant contributions to the Society.

In September, the STC office and the Associate Fellows Committee will send a message to STC qualifying Senior Members and Society and community leaders describing the nomination process and the information required for a nominee's consideration by the Associate Fellows Committee. By September, this information will also available on the STC website at *www.stc.org/membership/recognition/honors*. Upon request, the Society office will email community leaders a list of all eligible nominees in their communities. Please email your request to *stc@stc.org*. If you want to submit yourself or a colleague as a nominee for Associate Fellow, please use the Recommendation for Associate Fellow form and refer to the completed sample forms on the STC website.

The Associate Fellows Committee encourages submitters to work with nominees to ensure applications are complete and accurate.

Completed nomination packages must be received by the committee by **1 November 2017.** Send them to the STC office at *stc@stc.org*, with a copy to the committee chair, Nicky Bleiel, at *nbleiel@gmail.com*. In January 2018, the STC Board of Directors will consider the nominees forwarded to them by the Associate Fellows Committee. In May, at the 2018 STC Technical Communication Summit in Orlando FL, the Society will recognize the new Associate Fellows at an honors reception.

For more information, refer to the Associate Fellows Committee Web page at *www.stc.org/membership/recognition/honors* or contact Nicky Bleiel, at *nbleiel@gmail.com*.



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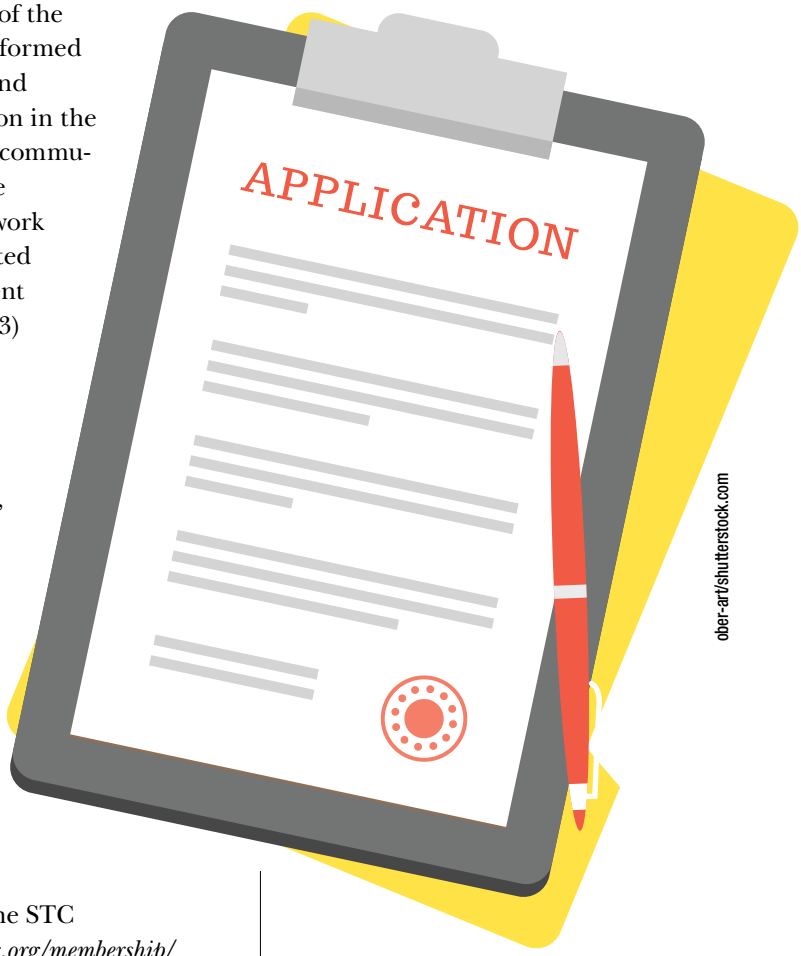
Fellow Applications Due 1 November 2017

EACH YEAR, THE STC Fellows Nominating Committee invites STC Associate Fellows who have held that rank for three years or more to submit an application to the committee for possible elevation to the rank of STC Fellow. This honor is the highest honor that STC can bestow upon a member. It recognizes members who are industry leaders and have made significant positive contributions to the advancement of technical communication.

The application form with instructions and details about the evaluation criteria will be available by 1 September. The committee thoroughly reviews each nominee's application, researches and verifies the nominee's qualifications, and contacts the nominee's references. When all evaluations are completed, the committee recommends qualified nominees to the STC Board of Directors for consideration. Those nominees receiving a two-thirds favorable vote from the board will receive the honor as long as their membership is in good standing and they meet the requirements as stated in the guidelines. (If the committee determines that a nominee is not qualified for elevation to the rank of STC Fellow, it will provide a brief explanation of why the nominee does not meet the qualifications.)

To be considered for elevation to the rank of STC Fellow, you must have accomplished all of the following: (1) performed important work and attained distinction in the field of technical communication; (2) done notable original work that has contributed to the advancement of the field; and (3) made significant contributions to STC. Length of career, quality of accomplishments, service to the Society, and continuity of achievement are all factors in the selection process.



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You can find the application and related information on the STC website at *www.stc.org/membership/recognition/honors*. Send your completed application to the Society office at *stc@stc.org*, with a copy to Paul Mueller at *paul.mueller@pobox.com* to arrive no later than 1 November 2017. The committee will forward their recommendations to the STC Board, who will consider nominees in January 2018. The Society will recognize new Fellows at the honors reception in May at the 2018 STC Technical Communication Summit in Orlando, FL.

For more information, review the Fellows Committee page available at *www.stc.org/membership/recongitions/honors* or contact committee chair Paul Mueller at *paul.mueller@pobox.com*.

Online Education, Training, and Technology: Some Thoughts on Symbiosis and Such

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BY JEANETTE EVANS | *STC Associate Fellow* and **CHARLES DULL**

LET'S LOOK AT some thoughts on online education, training, and new technology and how new technologies today no longer drive transformation and growth in online learning and training. Instead, the focus is on effectiveness and a fit within a larger offering.

We can look at this idea in light of quality pioneer W. Edwards Deming's statement that "It is not necessary to change. Survival is not mandatory." How can we apply this statement to today's world of online learning? We can do this by seeing that survival today means that online classes are becoming similar to training courses designed for professional development. We see a blending of assessment technologies with learning. Outcomes are mainstream. Online education is tied to performance and productivity.

What Deming suggested is that a dynamic is needed in an organization to provide the basis for sustainability. Deming would support the idea that continuous learning and training are part of organizational survival. As a proponent of the process of continuous improvement, Deming would argue that learning, innovation, and creation are needed for continuous improvement.

Today, colleges close because they fail to change. There can be a number of reasons why colleges close, but one of the major ones is an inability to meet the demands of a changing student demographic or an inability to improve operational effectiveness.

The schools that survive are the ones that change, innovate, and improve. Schools, in turn, help people learn to innovate. Schools provide training to improve productivity. Here we see a symbiosis. Learning, training, and innovation become more and more related. Double loop learning is what some call it.

We can remember when online learning evolved because of new technologies. This meant bridging gaps due to location or resources. But today, new technologies do not mean as much in online education. Instead of a focus, for example, on how much we can do with Adobe Connect, we now focus on the quality of connection, cost, and service.

This column investigates emerging technologies in education and how we might use them in our work. Whether it is social media, wearable technologies, the latest in printers, personalization, big data, BYOD, cloud computing, mobile apps, MOOCs, analytics, digital identity, haptic interfaces, augmented reality, or the internet of things, we can all benefit from current thinking on these technologies. Contact the columnists at *jeanette.evans@sbcglobal.net.*

Adaptive learning is another concept we should look at now. Adaptive learning deals with creating learning maps for an individual. It does not deal with building learning for a group. We are looking now at how to make this adaptive learning approach more effective.

As online learning grows we see the need for instructional designers who can use technology to

build effective assessments, create performance-based learning objectives, and understand what constitutes an effective learning experience.

Rubrics remain a useful tool. By automating rubrics to grade assignments, we can provide immediate feedback to students. Online learning now becomes more of a production process. The instruction has timelines and deliverables. Instruction becomes facilitation. Assessment is part of the design. That is what becomes effective online learning today.

Today's online learning technologies focus on repositories. These repositories curate content for measurable and effective delivery. We discuss whether a video conference would be helpful, not whether it is possible. We focus on the content and learning objects, not the technologies.

Learning management system design has become more fluid. Course room design in Canvas and LoudCloud provides a fluid and seamless learning experience. You can now add a design factor to the learning management system, assessment, presentation, content, conference, assignment, and delivery. The learning management system for training and education have everything in common. Training has learned from education about advances in learning management system design. Education has learned from training about measuring learning and outcomes.

Ideally, technology should not drive education. Technology is a means of delivery. It is a tool for measurement. It is also an enhancement to content. It provides an opportunity for connecting to available resources anywhere. What counts is a personal connection. That is what people still want and need, regardless of how electronic or digital the world has become. We all try to make a personal connection, whether it is through chatting, Instagramming, social media, streaming, the WikiPages of an LMS, or journals.

For more on the topic of online education and training, please see *Symbiosis: The New Paradigm in Online Education and Training.*

DR. CHARLES DULL *is Associate Dean of the IT Center of Excellence at Cuyahoga Community College.*

Associate Fellow JEANETTE EVANS *writes often for* Intercom *and is a co-editor for the award-winning newsletter of the NEO Chapter.*

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Organization Events Across the Globe

F.Y.I. lists information about nonprofit ventures only. Please send information to *intercom@stc.org.*

1 12-15 June
The **Association of Proposal Management Professionals (APMP)** will hold its 2017 Annual Bid and Proposal Con 12-15 June at the New Orleans Marriott in New Orleans, LA.
APMP
http://www.apmp.org/events
membership@apmp.org

2 15-17 June
The **American Society for Indexing (ASI)** 2017 Annual ASI – Beacon by the Bay conference will be held at the Holiday Inn by the Bay Hotel and Convention Center in Portland, ME.
ASI
https://www.asindexing.org/conference-2017/
(480) 245-6750

3 23-26 July
The **IEEE International Communication Society** will hold its annual conference, ProComm 2017, 23-26 July at the University of Wisconsin-Madison with a conference theme of "Making Waves."
IEEE PCS
http://sites.ieee.org/pcs/procomm2017/
Erin.Friess@unt.edu

4 5-7 Oct
The **Council for Programs in Technical and Scientific Communication (CPTSC)** will hold its 2017 Annual Meeting, with a conference theme of User-centered Program Design, at the Georgia Conference Center in Savannah, GA.
CPTSC
http://www.cptsc.org/annual.html
conference2017@cptsc.org

5 8-10 Oct
The **Public Relations Society of America** will hold its 2017 International Conference 8-10 October at the Boston Marriott Copley Place in Boston, MA.
PRSA
(212) 460-1400

6 9-13 Oct
The **Human Factors and Ergonomics Society (HFES)** annual meeting, HFES 2017, will take place 9-13 October at the JW Marriot in Austin, TX.
HFES
https://www.hfes.org/web/HFESMeetings/2017annual-meeting.html

7 25-28 Oct
The **American Translators Association (ATA)** will hold its 58th Annual Conference 25-28 October at the Washington Hilton in Washington, DC.
ATA
https://www.atanet.org/conf/2017/
ata@atanet.org

8 1-4 Nov
The **American Medical Writers Association (AMWA)** will hold its 2017 Medical Writing & Communication Conference 1-4 November at the Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort in Orlando, FL.
AMWA
conference@amwa.org
(240) 238-0940

Building a Log Home Is Easy If You Know Tech Comm

BY BERNARD ASCHWANDEN | *STC Associate Fellow*

ANY DOCUMENTATION PROJECT starts with an end goal. The same can be said about building a house. About 10 years ago, my wife Vivian and I bought an acre of land. We hoped that within 10 to 15 years, we'd have a chance to build a mythical beast: a log home on a lake, surrounded by trees, on time, and within a realistic budget.

It's important to start with a good foundation. In a documentation project, you want a clear idea of the finished product (the software, hardware, services to deliver, or whatever your company produces).

For a house, the foundation makes all the difference. Once we saw the shoreline, we contracted to build a topographical map to see the structural layout of what we had.

With an understanding of the lay of the land, we could identify the home we wanted and find a supplier. We wanted someone with a track record, a good understanding of what we wanted, and a personality fit, and Steve at True North Log Homes was our eventual choice.

We looked at plans, scoped out what worked for us, customized it, and got input on material costs and what we might expect the entire project to cost. Now we knew what might impact the delivery of the finished product, and had an estimate of cost and time. We needed framers, plumbers, electricians, heavy equipment operators, engineers, and masons. There would be costs for clearing land, building a foundation and basement, adding a fireplace, stairs, deck, doors, and windows. We had to price water, septic, heating, cooling, and electrical services. Once priced, we added about 25% to the budget for stuff we missed! We had to carefully track how much was spent.

Projects require reading supporting content. We read information about every part of the house: bylaws, building code, types of materials, contracts, and more. We had to learn the jargon of various trades, know how it connected to other workers, and integrate what it said into the overall plan. After all, the audience makes all the difference in technical communication.

We dealt with a broad range of skilled tradespeople who needed us to speak their language. Every part of the house had information that different people needed to know. They also helped us to understand the specifics they needed to get to the end goal of building a fantastic log home.

We also had jobsite health and safety to think about: safety boots, glasses, gloves, properly fitted clothes, and insurance for damage. We had to ensure ice/snow was cleared away, and water to stay hydrated was needed. Keeping people safe is always a consideration when you have so many moving parts on a project.

Once all the details were resolved, we started to build the foundation, which went in surprisingly quickly. Once planned, a solid base with in-floor heating was poured, and concrete filled the base and the ICF walls. With the foundation in place, we were able to lay the main floor and start to add logs! After that, it was time to apply a stain and start the second floor. The exterior shell of the building went up very quickly, but finer details took time.

Now we are into the building interior. That means time to talk with the contractors, co-ordinate schedules, review plans with each specialist in a given trade, ensure neighbors are kept happy, and make long trips to and from the job site. But at the end of the day, we'll have a chance to sit on the deck, or just relax on a bench and watch the sun set as we enjoy a cold drink.

How does it all connect to documentation? Our background in tech comm means we have the skills and experience to deal with various professionals, communicate our needs, manage when change is unexpected, be creative with solutions, and still deliver a top-quality product!

See you at the dock after work?

To see more pictures, visit *https://goo.gl/photos/aLcbbtka1nL8cUWE6* and, please, add comments with your thoughts or questions!

Exterior of the author's cabin

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